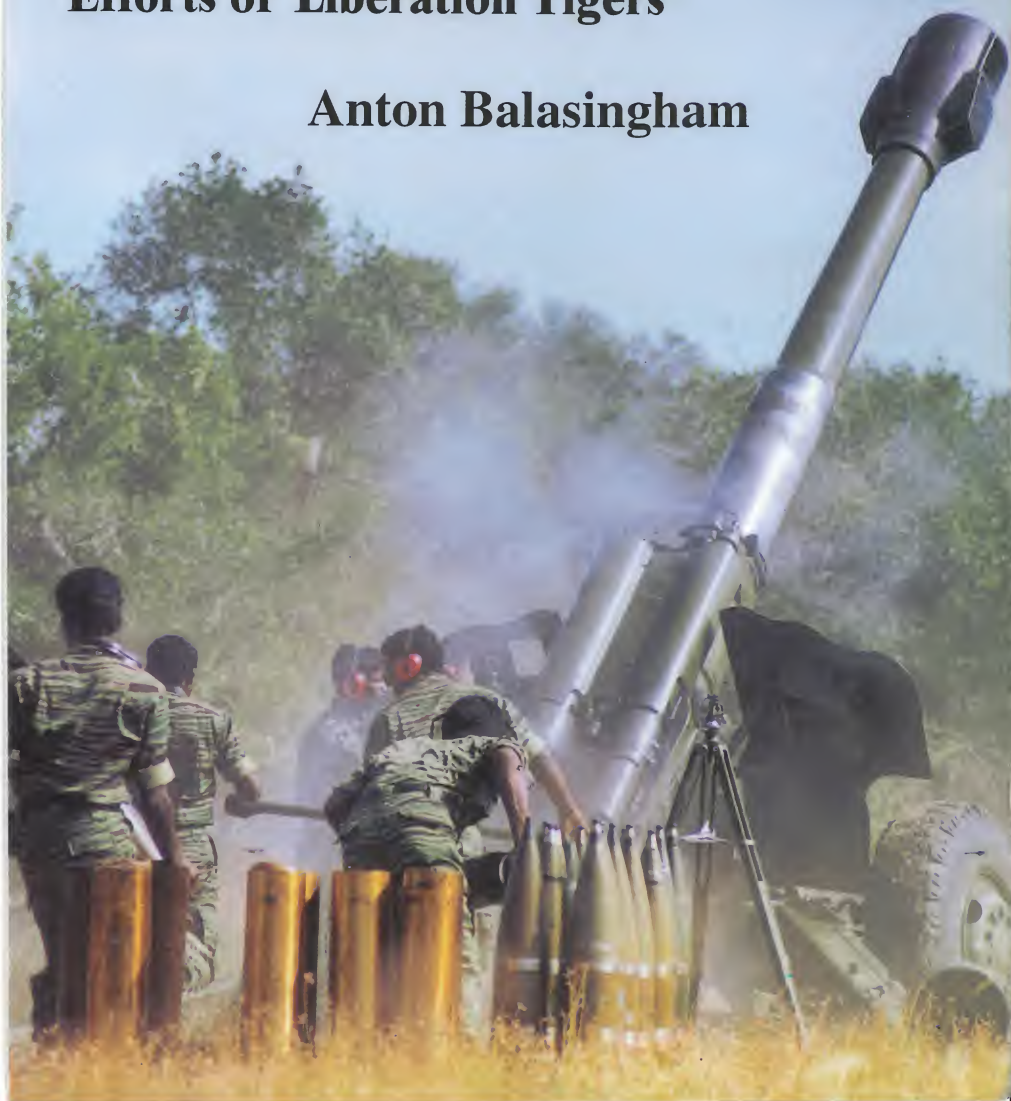


War and Peace

**Armed Struggle and Peace
Efforts of Liberation Tigers**

Anton Balasingham



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*This book is dedicated to
my loving wife
Adele Ann*

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- Adele Balasingham

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INTRODUCTION

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is the heart and soul of the Tamil struggle for self-determination. It is the national freedom movement of the people of Tamil Eelam, and a predominant actor in Sri Lankan politics. It is both a political organisation as well as a military power, running a de-facto administration in the majority of areas in north-eastern Sri Lanka, the historical homeland of the Tamil-speaking people. The LTTE has an evolutionary history extending over more than 32 years. Born as an underground guerrilla outfit in the early seventies under the leadership of Mr Velupillai Pirapaharan, it has grown, developed and expanded into a national liberation organisation with the overwhelming support of the Tamil masses.

The organisation, in its evolutionary growth, has faced severe obstacles, dilemmas and challenges. It has had to fight the most bloody and savage battles against formidable forces and treacherous enemies. It has had to engage in both war, and in peace processes. In the military field, it has achieved remarkable victories and gained global recognition as one of the most efficient fighting machines in the world. The organisation has made immense sacrifices in life and blood in the cause of national freedom. It has also engaged in the realm of peace, seeking a fair and reasonable political solution, without relinquishing the inalienable rights of the Tamil people. However, because the enemy has been deceitful, dishonest and defiant and refused fundamental justice to our people, accomplishment at the negotiating table has not matched the military feats on the battlefields. The intransigent attitude of the Sinhala political establishment had made the negotiating process difficult

and painful. From the Thimpu talks until the recent Norwegian facilitated negotiation process, the LTTE has involved in all the peace efforts, and made sincere attempts to seek a political solution. But all the talks collapsed or stalemated. The Sri Lanka government and the Colombo media blamed the LTTE as the villain of peace and the prime causal factor for failures at a negotiated settlement. The state inspired disinformation campaign in Colombo, and by some interested parties in India, discredited the LTTE in the eyes of the international community as an opponent of peace. This misconception, based on distortion of fact, compelled me to write this comprehensive book: to tell the truth with authentic records of historical events, of the active engagement of the LTTE in peace negotiations.

As the political advisor and theoretician of the organisation I have worked closely with the Tamil Tigers, and with their leader, Mr Velupillai Pirapaharan, for twenty-six years. I have participated in various peace talks, in most cases as the chief negotiator for the LTTE. During the period of Indian intervention, I was associated with Mr Pirapaharan in all encounters with Indian leaders and officials. With this wide personal experience with the organisation, its leadership and its political project, I feel that I am in a position to write the definitive history of the LTTE's political struggle, particularly the struggle in the negotiating arena.

This book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the non-violent political struggles of the post-independent era, as well as the birth, growth and development of the armed resistance movement of the Tamils, spearheaded by the LTTE. The history of the Tamil struggle for self-determination, spans a period of more than 50 years. The struggle has taken different forms and modes at different times in its evolutionary history. In the early stages, during the 1950s and 60s, the political struggle was peaceful and non-violent, confined to parliamentary and constitutional politics. The old generation of Tamil leaders were Gandhians, committed to the principles and philosophy of the great Indian leader. The non-violent political struggles of the Tamils based on the Gandhian philosophy of 'ahimsa', inspired the spirit of nationalism and mobilised the Tamil nation into a collective force. Caste fragmented society rose into a united nation demanding political liberties, equal opportunities and self-rule in their historical homeland.

The repressive Sri Lankan state reacted violently to the Tamil demand for political rights. Military repression soon quelled the non-violent political agitations. Having crushed the peaceful Gandhian struggles, the Sinhala government intensified state repression. The multi-faceted oppression deeply affected the socio-economic life of the Tamils. Deprived of education and employment opportunities, the rebellious Tamil youth adopted political violence. The state violence against the young Tamil rebels increased. The vicious cycle of repression and resistance aggravated the conditions of violence. As the state violence intensified, the Tamil resistance assumed the character of armed struggle, and the LTTE was born in the early 70s and grew into a fierce guerrilla movement. The first chapter narrates the historical background of the state repression and the growth and development of the Tamil armed resistance movement.

The second chapter deals with the turbulent history of Indian intervention in Sri Lanka. The Indian involvement began during the racial holocaust of July 1983 and culminated in March 1990, with the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). India's intervention marked a critical and controversial period in Indo-Sri Lanka relations, having political, military and strategic ramifications. The intervention began as an overt diplomatic offensive on one side, and a covert military operation on the other, designed to bring the defiant Sri Lankan President Jayawardane, out from the fold of western powers, to the geo-political dominance of India. Later, in the course of time, Indian involvement transformed into a protracted mediatory effort, starting from Thimpu talks in 1985 and ending in the Indo-Lanka Agreement in 1987. Following the Agreement, relations between India and the Liberation Tigers, due to unforeseen events, became hostile and exploded into an armed conflict that lasted more than two years. In this intriguing and complex history of Indian intervention, the LTTE was involved in the covert Indian military training programme and in the Indian mediated peace efforts. Further, the LTTE became party to conflict with India. I have provided a concrete analysis of the crucial role played by our liberation organisation in different circumstances at different times in the complex and controversial history of the Indian involvement. Because of the centrality of the role played by the LTTE and the politico-military debacles India faced, the Tamil

Tigers became the object of negative criticism, particularly from Indian political analysts. While repudiating those criticisms as biased and unfair, I have presented, in this chapter, the authentic story of the challenges, difficulties and pressures the LTTE faced in the events of that time. The analysis in this chapter is important for Sri Lanka watchers and students of history, since it is the first time the Tamil side of the story of Indian intervention, is revealed.

The third chapter provides an analysis of the peace talks held between Premadasa's administration and the LTTE. This chapter is written by my wife Adele and taken from her book, 'The Will to Freedom'. I have added this piece of writing from her book with her kind permission since it is a comprehensive, objective study available on the subject. Adele played an important role in the Colombo talks as the secretary to the LTTE delegation, and assisted me in my role as the chief negotiator. I am of the view that the insertion of her analysis of the Premadasa-LTTE talks will add scholarship to my work, covering the entire spectrum of the LTTE's participation in peace talks. The inclusion of this phase of negotiations in the book is necessitated by the fact that it relates to the Indian intervention period, which I have treated extensively in the second chapter. The LTTE, as Adele has argued, entered into a dialogue with the Premadasa government with the objective of securing the withdrawal of the Indian army occupying the Tamil homeland. The politico-diplomatic effort eventually succeeded because Pirapaharan and Premadasa had common interests in the matter.

The fourth chapter deals with the ill-fated negotiations of 1994-95, between the Kumaratunga government and the LTTE. To comprehend the strategy adopted by President Kumaratunga today, a critical examination of the previous attempt to seek a negotiated settlement with the LTTE in the Jaffna peace talks, is relevant. This chapter is the revised version of my book entitled, 'The Politics of Duplicity', with all the important letters exchanged between President Kumaratunga and the LTTE leader. The analysis of the Jaffna talks demonstrates that Kumaratunga's peace making exercise was a duplicitous act undertaken in bad faith. There was no genuine political will or determination on the part of Kumaratunga administration either to alleviate the existential suffering of the Tamils or to find a permanent settlement to the ethnic conflict. Under the guise of peace negotiations the government prepared the

ground for a major invasion of the Jaffna peninsula. Since the President is still at the helm of power and making efforts to resume peace talks with the Liberation Tigers, it is extremely useful to revisit the Jaffna peace talks to understand the real reasons behind the breakdown.

The last chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the six sessions of peace talks facilitated by the Royal Norwegian Government. The talks began on 16 September 2002, in the naval base at Sattahip, Thailand, and the sessions covered a period of six months, ending in the hot water resort of Hakone, Japan.

The commencement of peace talks was the result of years of Herculean effort by Norwegian peace envoys to bring the adversaries to the negotiating table. The major achievement of the Norwegians was the formulation of a comprehensive ceasefire agreement between the parties in conflict, which has lasted more than two and a half years to date, providing a stable ground for negotiations. There was goodwill and mutual trust between the negotiating teams, and the parties were able to engage in serious dialogue, with a commitment to advance the peace process in stages. As the LTTE delegation insisted on de-escalation of the conflict, normalisation of civilian life, and resolution to immediate, urgent humanitarian issues, the Sri Lankan government agreed to set-up a joint sub-committee to address those critical issues identified by the LTTE. The issues related to de-escalation and normalisation soon ran into serious difficulties, as the Sri Lankan armed forces controlling populated areas in the northeast refused to relax their grip of occupation and demanded the disarming of the LTTE and decommissioning of its weapons, as a condition to allow the displaced population to resettle in the military occupied zones. This led to the collapse of the Sub-Committee on De-Escalation, and the crucial issue of restoring normal civilian life became an insurmountable problem. The pledge to institutionalise an interim administrative structure was postponed indefinitely in the light of constitutional hurdles, and the Sub-Committee on Immediate Reconstruction and Humanitarian Needs (SIRHN), which was established as a provisional mechanism, became non-functional, without adequate funds and implementation authority. The enthusiasm and euphoria that manifested in the earlier stages of the talks, soon died down. Faced with a lack of progress, the facilitators and

the Sri Lankan government unfortunately claimed progress in the political process, by over-emphasizing a decision made by the parties to explore federal models, a conceptual misunderstanding which I have treated extensively within the theoretical framework of the right to self-determination.

The LTTE leadership became disillusioned and unhappy over lack of progress in the talks in face of the mounting existential and humanitarian problems of the war affected Tamil people. The hostility of the armed forces and the provocative incidents on the sea also aggravated the gloomy environment. Furthermore, the excessive internationalisation of the process, with the active involvement of world governments in pursuit of their interests and agendas, affected the status of equality, or rather, the power balance of the parties, to the disadvantage of the LTTE. The exclusion of the LTTE at the Washington Donor meeting held in April 2003, signalled the danger of marginalisation of the organisation, depriving it of the status of parity on the international forums. The LTTE leadership decided to suspend their participation in the peace talks and explained the reasons to Ranil Wickremesinge. Ultimately, when the LTTE leadership submitted its own proposals on an Interim Self-Governing Authority, executive President Kumaratunga struck back, triggering the downfall of Wickremesinge's government. The concluding part of the chapter provides a critical analysis of the shortcomings of the Norwegian facilitated peace talks.

The book provides a historical study of the growth of Tamil nationalism, which eventually took organisational form into an armed resistance movement headed by the LTTE. The early military history of the organisation and the whole series of negotiations held at different locations are accurately presented in detail. The work opens up new realms of material, hitherto unknown, and provides in depth detail and insight into the dynamics of the Tamil liberation struggle.

CHAPTER I

THE RISE OF TAMIL NATIONALISM AND ARMED STRUGGLE

Historical Background to the Ethnic Conflict

The island of Sri Lanka (known as Ceylon until the promulgation of the new Republican Constitution in 1972) is the historical homeland of two ancient civilizations, of two distinct ethno-national formations with different languages, traditions, cultures, territories and histories. The history of the Tamils in the island dates back to pre-historical times. When the ancestors of the Sinhala people arrived in the island with their legendary Prince Vijaya from the 'city of Sinhapura in Bengal' in the 6th century BC they encountered ancient Dravidian (Tamil) settlements. Even the Sinhala historical chronicles - *Dipavamsa* and *Mahavamsa* - document the existence of Dravidian kingdoms of Nagas and Yakkas before the advent of Sinhala settlers in the island. In an attempt to distort the authentic history of the original settlers, the Buddhist monks, who wrote the historical chronicles, depict the ancient Tamils as 'non-humans' as 'demons possessing super-human powers'. Though the question of original settlement is obscured by legends and mythologies, modern scholars hold the view that the Tamils were indisputably the earliest settlers. Because of the geographical proximity of southern India to the island, it is highly probable that the Dravidian Tamils were the original inhabitants before the sea landing of Prince Vijaya and his crew from northern India.

The Buddhist historical chronicles record the turbulent historical past of the island from 6th century BC, the history of great wars between Tamil and Sinhala kings, of invasions from southern Indian Tamil empires, of violent struggles for supremacy between

Tamil and Sinhala kingdoms. The island was ruled by Sinhalese kings and by Tamil kings at times and the intermittent wars compelled the Sinhala kings to move their capital southwards. From the 13th century onwards, until the advent of foreign colonialism, the Tamils lived as a stable national formation in their own kingdom, ruled by their own kings, within a specified territory of their traditional homelands embracing the northern and eastern provinces.

Marco Polo once described Sri Lanka as the island paradise of the earth. The British colonialists called it 'the pearl of the Indian ocean'. Separated from the southern coast of India by only a twenty-two mile stretch of water, the island has a territorial area of 25,332 square miles. For centuries before colonial penetration, the island had a traditional self-sustaining economy with a reputation of being the granary of the East. The mode of economic production in the pre-colonial epoch was feudal in character. Structured within the feudal mode, the economic organisation of the Tamil nation had a unique set of relations of production characterised by caste stratification with its hierarchy of functions. The extensive hydraulic agrarian system with its network of tanks and canals for which the mediaeval Ceylon was famous, had fallen out of use and was decaying and disappearing under the thick jungles in the north as well as in the north central provinces. The Sinhalese feudal aristocracy, by this time, had moved to the central highlands and established Kandy as the capital.

When the Portuguese first landed on the island in the beginning of the 16th century, they found two ancient kingdoms, the Tamils in the north-eastern region and the Sinhalese in the south, two distinct communities of people with different cultures constituting themselves as separate nations ruled by their own kings with sovereign state structures. The Portuguese entered into treaties and then fought battles and finally in the battle of 1619 they conquered the Tamil kingdom and hanged the Tamil king *Sankili Kumaran*. Yet the Portuguese and the Dutch, who came after them, governed the Tamil nation as a separate kingdom, recognising the integrity of the Tamil homeland and the ethnic identity of the Tamil people. In 1796 the British colonial empire took control of the island from the Dutch and in 1833 imposed a unified state structure amalgamating the two national formations irrespective of the ethnic differences. Thus foreign colonialism laid the foundation for the present

national conflict. Though the British, for administrative purposes, created a unitary state, they recognised that the island had been the homeland of two separate nations. In 1799 Sir Hugh Cleghorn, the first Colonial Secretary observed in the well known 'Cleghorn Minute', 'two different nations, from very ancient period have divided between them the possessions of the island: the Sinhalese inhabiting the interior in its southern and western parts from the river Wallouve to that of Chillow, and the Malabars (the Tamils) who possess the northern and eastern districts. These two nations, differ entirely in their religion, language and manners.'

Though the Sinhalese and the Tamils have an ancient past with deep historical roots buried beyond the Christian era and possess elements of distinct nations, the island of Sri Lanka, in the course of history, developed a heterogeneous culture. There are other ethnic groups living in the island, of which the Muslims and the plantation Tamils constitute themselves as significant communities of people with distinct cultural identities.

The Sri Lankan Muslims, whose origins can be traced back to the 10th century, arrived in the island as traders from Arabia. The Muslims adopted the Tamil language as their mother tongue and settled down predominately in the eastern region and in the southern districts. Though they embraced Tamil language and shared a common economic existence with the Tamils as a peasant community in the east, it is their religion, Islam, which provides them with the consciousness of collective cultural identity as a distinct ethnic group.

British Colonialism and the Tamils

The effects of Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule on the island's pre-capitalist economic formation are minimal when compared to the profound effects of British colonial domination. The most significant event of British colonial rule was the imposition of an exploitative plantation economy.

It was in 1815, with the conquest of the Kandyian kingdom by the British, the painful history of the Tamil plantation workers begins. It was during that time the British colonialists decided to

introduce the plantation economy in the island. Coffee plantations were set up in the early 1820s, a crop which flourished in high altitudes. Speculators and entrepreneurs from England rushed to the newly conquered mountain areas and expropriated vast tracts of land, by deceit, from the Kandyian peasantry. The Kandyian peasants refused to abandon their traditional subsistence holdings to become wage earners on these new capitalist estates. The pressure exerted by the colonial state to draw the labour power from the indigenous Sinhalese peasantry did not work. The British colonial masters were thus compelled to draw on their limitless reserves of labour from India. A massive army of cheap labourers were conscripted from southern India who, partly by their own poverty and partly by coercion, moved into this Promised Land to be condemned to an appalling form of slave labour. A notorious system of labour contract was established which allowed hundreds of thousands of Tamil labourers to migrate to the plantation estates. Between the 1840s and 1850s a million people were imported. The original workers were recruited from Tamil Nadu districts of Tinneveli, Madurai and Tanjore and were from the poor, oppressed castes. This army of recruited workers were forced to walk hundreds of miles from their villages to Rameswaram and again from Mannar through impenetrable jungles to the central hill-lands of Ceylon. Thousands of this immiserated mass perished on their long hazardous journey, a journey chartered with disease, death and despair. Those who survived the journey were weak and exhausted and thousands of them died in the nightmarish, unhealthy conditions of the early plantations.

The coffee plantation economy collapsed in the 1870s when a leaf disease ravaged the plantations. But the economic system survived intact with the introduction of a successor crop - tea. Tea was introduced in the 1880s on a wide scale. The tea plantation economy expanded with British entrepreneurial investment, export markets and consolidated companies transforming the structure of production and effectively changing the economic foundation of the old feudal society creating a basis for the development of the capitalist economic system. Though the plantation economy effectively changed the process of production, the Tamil labourers - men, women and children - were permanently condemned to slave under the white masters and the indigenous capitalists. The British

planters who brought the Indian Tamil labourers into Sri Lanka deliberately segregated them inside the plantations in what is known as the 'line rooms'. Such a notorious policy of segregation condemned the Tamils permanently to these miserable ghettos, isolated them from the rest of the population and prevented them from buying their own land, building their own houses and leading a free social existence. British colonial rule built up the Tamil plantation community within the heartland of the Kandyian Sinhalese and manipulated the Tamil-Sinhala antagonism to divide and rule. Reduced to conditions of slavery by colonialism, the Tamil plantation workers toiled in utter misery. Their sweat and blood sustained the worst form of exploitative economy that fed the English masters with the surplus value and enriched the Sinhala land owning classes.

The impact of British colonial domination on the indigenous Tamil people of the northern and eastern provinces had far reaching effects. On the political level, British colonial rule imposed a unified administration with centralised institutions, establishing a singular state structure. This forceful annexation and amalgamation of two separate kingdoms, of two nations of people, disregarding their past historical existence, their socio-cultural distinctions and their ethnic differences are the root causes of the Tamil-Sinhala racial antagonism.

The Tamil social formation was constituted by a unique socio-economic organisation, in which feudal elements and caste systems were tightly interwoven to form the foundation of this complex society. The notorious system of caste stratification bestows, by right of birth, privilege and status to the high caste Tamils. The most exploited and oppressed people are from the so-called depressed castes who eke out a meagre existence under this system of slavery. Privileged by caste and provided with better educational facilities by foreign missionaries, a section of the high caste Tamils adopted the English educational system. A new class of English educated professional and white-collar workers emerged and became a part of the bureaucratic structure of the civil service. The English colonial masters encouraged the Tamils and provided them with an adequate share in the state administration under a notorious strategy of divide and rule, that later sparked the fires of Sinhala chauvinism.

The Tamil dominance in the state administrative structure, as well as in the plantation economic sector, the privileges enjoyed by the English educated elites and the spread of Christianity are factors that propelled the emergence of Sinhala nationalism. In the early stages, nationalist tendencies took the form of Buddhist revival, which gradually assumed a powerful political dominance. Under the slogan of Buddhist religious renaissance, a national chauvinistic ideology emerged with strong sediments of Tamil antagonism. The Buddhist religious leadership attacked both the Tamils and European colonialists and spoke of the greatness of the Sinhalese Aryan race.

Anagarika Dharmapala, a Buddhist thinker, wrote in his popular work, *'History of an Ancient Civilization'*, 'ethnologically, the Sinhalese are a unique race, inasmuch as they can boast that they have no slave blood in them, and were never conquered by either the pagan Tamils or European vandals who for three centuries devastated the land, destroyed ancient temples and nearly annihilated the historic race. This bright, beautiful island was made into a paradise by the Aryan Sinhalese before its destruction was brought about by the barbaric vandals....'

The Sinhala national chauvinism that emerged from the Buddhist religious resurgence viewed the Tamil dominance in the state apparatus and in the plantation economy as a threat to 'national development'. Such anti-Tamil antagonism articulated on the ideological level began to take concrete forms of social, political and economic oppression soon after the island's independence in 1948 when the state power was transferred to the Sinhala ruling elites.

State Oppression Against Tamils

Soon after the transfer of political power to the Sinhalese majority, national chauvinism reigned supreme and fuelled a vicious and violent form of state oppression against the Tamil people. State oppression has a continuous history of more than half a century since independence and has been practised by successive Sri Lanka governments. The oppression has a genocidal intent involving a

well-calculated plan aiming at the gradual and systematic destruction of the essential foundations of the Tamil nation. The state oppression therefore assumed the multi-dimensional thrust, attacking simultaneously on different levels of the conditions of existence of the Tamil people. It imperilled their linguistic rights, the right to education and employment; it deprived them of their right to ownership of their traditional lands; it endangered their religious and cultural life and as a consequence posed a serious threat to their very right to existence. The state oppression, in essence, struck the very foundations of the ethnic cohesion and identity of the Tamil people. As an integral part of this genocidal programme, the state organised periodical communal holocausts, which plagued the island, resulting in mass extermination of Tamils and the massive destruction of their property.

Soon after the independence of the island the Sri Lanka Parliament became the very instrument of majoritarian tyranny where racism reigned supreme and repressive laws were enacted against the minority communities. The first victims of the Sinhala racist onslaught were the Tamil plantation workers. A million of this working people, who toiled for the prosperity of the island for more than a century, were disenfranchised by the most infamous citizenship legislation in Sri Lankan political history, which robbed these people of their basic human rights and reduced them to an appalling condition of statelessness. Having been deprived of the right of political participation, the state Parliament was closed for this huge mass of working people. Before the introduction of these laws, seven members of Parliament represented the plantation Tamils. In the general election of 1952, as a direct consequence of these citizenship laws not a single representative could be returned.

The Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian Pakistani Citizenship Act of 1949 laid down stringent conditions for the acquisition of citizenship by descent as well as by virtue of residence for a stipulated period. These Acts were implemented in such a manner that only about 130,000 out of more than a million people were able to acquire citizenship. The cumulative effects of these notorious legislations were so disastrous that made the conditions of life of these working people miserable and tragic. Having been reduced to a condition of statelessness, nearly a million Tamils were denied the right to participate in local and national elections;

were denied employment opportunities in the public and private sectors; were denied the right to purchase lands; were denied the right to enter business of any sort. Such a condition of statelessness condemned this entire population of workers, the classical working class of the island, into a dehumanised people devoid of any rights and dumped them perpetually in their plantation ghettos to suffer degradation and despair.

The most vicious form of oppression calculated to destroy the ethnic identity of the Tamils was the aggressive state aided colonisation, which began soon after Independence, and has now swallowed nearly three thousand square miles of Tamil territory. This planned occupation of Tamil lands by hundreds of thousands of Sinhala people, aided and abetted by the state, in the areas where a huge population of landless Tamil peasantry had been striving for a tiny plot to toil, was aimed to disrupt the demographic pattern and to reduce the Tamils to a minority in their own historical lands. The worst affected areas are in the eastern province. The gigantic Gal Oya and Madura Oya development schemes have robbed huge bulks of land from the Muslim people of Batticaloa district. Sinhala colonisation schemes in Allai and Kantalai and the Yan Oya project have engulfed the Trincomalee area. This consistent policy of forceful annexation of Tamil traditional land exposes the vicious nature of the racist policies of the Sinhala ruling elites.

The state oppression soon penetrated into the sphere of language, education and employment. The 'Sinhala Only' movement spearheaded by Mr SWRD Bandaranayake brought him to political power in 1956. His first Act in Parliament put an end to the official and equal status enjoyed by the Tamil language and made Sinhala the only official language of the country. The 'Sinhala Only Act' demanded proficiency in Sinhala in the civil service. Tamil public servants, deprived of the rights of increments and promotions, were forced to learn the Sinhala language or leave employment. Employment opportunities in the public service were practically closed to Tamils.

Education was the sphere where state oppression struck most deeply to deprive a vast population of Tamil youth of access to higher education and employment. A notorious discriminatory selective device called 'standardisation' was introduced in 1970, which demanded higher marks from the Tamil students for

university admissions whereas the Sinhalese students were admitted with lower grades. This discriminatory device dramatically reduced the number of admissions of Tamil students to universities and seriously undermined their prospects of higher studies.

State oppression also showed its intensity in the economic strangulation of the Tamil nation. Apart from a few state-owned factories built soon after independence, Tamil areas were totally isolated from all national development projects for nearly fifty years. While the Sinhala nation flourished with massive development projects, the Tamil nation was alienated as an unwanted colony and suffered serious economic deprivation.

The anti-Tamil riots that periodically erupted in the island should not be viewed as spontaneous outbursts of inter-communal violence between the two communities. All major racial conflagrations that erupted violently against the Tamil people were inspired and masterminded by the Sinhala regimes as a part of a genocidal programme. Violent anti-Tamil riots exploded in the island in 1956, 1958, 1961, 1974, 1977, 1979, 1981 and in July 1983. In these racial holocausts thousands of Tamils, including women and children were massacred in the most gruesome manner, billions of rupees worth of Tamil property was destroyed and hundreds of thousands made refugees. The state's armed forces colluded with Sinhalese hooligans and vandals in their violent rampage of arson, rape and mass murder.

The cumulative effect of this multi-dimensional oppression had far reaching consequences. It threatened the very survival of the Tamil people. It aggravated the ethnic conflict and made reconciliation and co-existence between the two nations extremely difficult. It stiffened the Tamil militancy and created conditions for the emergence of the Tamil armed resistance movement. It paved the way for the invocation of the Tamil right to self-determination and secession.

Tamil National Movement and the Federal Party

Tamil nationalism as an ideology and as a concrete political movement thus arose as a historical consequence of Sinhala chauvinistic state oppression. As a collective sentiment of an oppressed people awakening their national self-consciousness, Tamil

nationalism contained within itself progressive and revolutionary elements. It was progressive since it expressed the profound political aspirations of the oppressed Tamil masses for freedom, dignity and justice. It had a revolutionary potential since it was able to mobilise all sections of the Tamil people and poised them for a political struggle for national freedom.

In the early stages of the evolutionary political history of the Tamils, Tamil national sentiments found organisational expression in the Federal Party. (The Tamil designation of the Federal Party was *Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi*. The late Mr SJV Chelvanayakam founded it in December 1949). At the general election of 1956, the Federal Party swept to victory in Tamil electorates and emerged as a powerful political force to spearhead the Tamil national movement. As a national movement championing the cause of the Tamil nation, the party did contain progressive and democratic contents and was able to organise and mobilise various strata of classes and castes into a huge mass movement.

The failure of the Left movement to establish a strong political base among the Tamil people was due to its lack of political vision in comprehending and situating the concrete conditions of national oppression. Positing the class struggle over and against the national struggle of an oppressed nation they conceived the national patriotic upsurge of the Tamil masses as the manifestation of a reactionary form of ethno-nationalism ignoring the progressive and revolutionary potential of the struggle. Their lack of theoretical perspective in this crucial domain allowed them to speak of 'proletarian internationalism' without realising the political truth that national oppression is the enemy of class struggle and that working class solidarity is practically unattainable when national oppression presents itself as the major contradiction between the two nations. The success of the Federal Party in securing popular mass support lies in the fact that they apprehended the onslaught of Sinhala state oppression against the Tamil nation. The thrust of the multi-dimensional oppression, the leadership rightly perceived, would jeopardise the identity and cohesiveness of the Tamil national formation. Warning of this impending danger, they campaigned and organised all sections of the Tamil masses, invoking the spirit of nationalism. The Federal Party thus emerged as a powerful national movement unifying the formless conglomeration of classes and castes into

popular mass movement poised for sustained democratic struggles.

The adamant determination of the government of Mr Bandaranayake to implement the Sinhala Only Act became a crucial political challenge to the Federal Party, which decided to launch a Satyagraha campaign (passive, peaceful, sit-in protests of Gandhian non-violent method) as a form of popular resistance. It was on the morning of 5 June 1956, when Parliament assembled to debate the Sinhala Only Act the Federal Party Parliamentarians, party members and sympathisers in their hundreds performed satyagraha on the Galle Face green just opposite the Parliament building in Colombo. Within hours the satyagrahis were mobbed by thousands of Sinhala hooligans who stoned and assaulted the peaceful picketers. When the situation became uncontrollable and dangerous, the Federal Party leaders called off the protest. The rioters, who harassed and persecuted the satyagrahis, went on a blood-thirsty rampage in the capital city assaulting the Tamils and looting their property. The riot soon spread to several parts of the island with violent incidents of murder, looting, arson and rape. In Amparai, more than one hundred Tamils were massacred. Irrespective of the spreading communal violence and the Tamil protest campaign, the Sinhala Only Act was passed and the Tamil language lost its official status.

Following the implementation of the Sinhala Only Act, the Federal Party organised mass agitation campaigns demanding a federal form of autonomy for the Tamil nation. In the elections of 1956, the Federal Party won an overwhelming victory, obtaining a clear mandate from the Tamil people for a federal form of self-government. The Federal Party also made a decision to intensify the Satyagraha campaign to achieve its demands. The demand for political autonomy for the Tamil nation, along with the rising wave of Tamil nationalism, alarmed the Sinhala ruling elite. Mr Bandaranayake, in a desperate attempt to arrest the growing conflict, agreed to give concessions to the Tamils. A pact was signed between him and the Federal Party leader, Mr SJV Chelvanayagam, that provided some elements of political autonomy under *regional councils*, with a promise to stop Sinhala colonisation of Tamil areas. The pact sparked suspicion and resentment among the Sinhala racist elements. The man who exploited this explosive situation was a JR Jayawardane, who later became the powerful President of Sri

Lanka. Jayawardane, with the support of Buddhist monks, organised a massive protest march to Kandy demanding the abrogation of the pact. This Sinhala chauvinistic upsurge even inspired some ministers of Mr Bandaranayake's Cabinet to organise a protest of their own against the pact. Led by these ministers, a long procession of bhikkus (monks) and their racist sympathisers marched to the Prime Minister's residence carrying a copy of the pact in a coffin. The communal drama finally ended with the ceremonial burning of the coffin in front of the Prime Minister's official residence at Rosemead Place in Colombo where Mr Bandaranayake made a solemn pledge to abrogate the pact.

This great betrayal by the Sinhala political leadership blew up all hopes of racial harmony and the relations between the two nations became hostile. The ethnic friction gradually became intense and exploded into violent racial riots in 1958. This communal fury that ravaged throughout the island stained the pages of Sri Lanka's history with blood. The horror and savagery perpetrated against innocent Tamils are indescribable. Several hundreds were butchered, pregnant women were raped and murdered; children were hacked to death. In Panandura a Hindu priest was burnt alive. Several mutilated bodies were found in a well at Maha Oya. In Kalutara a Tamil family, while attempting to hide in a well, had petrol poured over them and when they begged for mercy they were set on fire. As the cries of agony arose when they were being roasted alive in a huge fireball, the racist spectators laughed and danced, enthralled by sadistic ecstasy. Hundreds of thousands lost their homes and several billions worth of Tamil property were either looted or burnt to ashes. While the flames of racial horror were consuming the whole island, Mr Bandaranayake watched this tragic holocaust with amusement and refused to declare a State of Emergency until the Tamils, as he was reported to have said, 'get a taste of it'. After twenty-four hours of calculated delay, a State of Emergency was declared. When the situation was brought under control, ten thousand Tamils were refugees, most of them civil servants, professionals and businessmen from Colombo who had to be shipped to the northern and eastern provinces for safety.

The Satyagraha Campaign

The 1958 racial holocaust cut a deep wedge in the relations between the Tamil and Sinhala nations. Tamil national sentiments ran high and erupted into massive agitation campaigns on the Tamil political arena. It was in the early part of 1961 that the Federal Party decided to launch direct action in the form of satyagraha in front of government offices in the northern and eastern provinces. The objective was to disrupt and disorganise the government's administrative structure in the Tamil homeland thereby exerting pressure on the government to accept the Tamil demand for federal autonomy.

The Satyagraha campaign of 1961 was a monumental event in the history of the Tamil national struggle. The campaign unfolded into a huge upsurge of the popular Tamil masses to register a national protest against the oppressive policies of the Sinhala ruling elites. This Civil Disobedience Campaign, which was inaugurated on the 20 February 1961 and lasted nearly three months, brought hundreds of thousands of Tamil people onto the streets to express their defiance and dissent to the oppressive state. Within a couple of weeks the whole government administrative machinery in the north and east was paralysed and the Tamil nation was practically cut off from the writ of the central government. This unprecedented historical event displayed the fast growing national solidarity of the Tamils and demonstrated their collective determination to fight for their political rights.

The campaign started as massive picketing in front of the government's main administrative office in Jaffna and soon spread to Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Trincomalee and Batticaloa and other towns. All sections of the Tamil speaking people, irrespective of religious and caste differences, enthusiastically participated in this peaceful popular protest. Thousands of plantation workers from the hill country areas converged in the north and east to express their militant solidarity. This massive national uprising encouraged the Federal Party leadership to open a postal service on the 14 April 1961 and Tamil national stamps were issued in thousands as an act of defiance against the state authority.

Alarmed by the rising tide of Tamil nationalism and the extraordinary success of the Civil Disobedience Campaign, the state

oppressive machinery reacted swiftly, mobilising the military. Large contingents of armed forces were dispatched to Tamil areas with 'special instructions' under Emergency powers. In the early hours of the 18 April 1961, troops suddenly swooped down on the satyagrahis in Jaffna and brutally attacked them with rifle butts and batons, fracturing skulls and limbs. This barbarous military violence unleashed against the non-violent agitators resulted in hundreds of them sustaining serious injuries. Under the guise of Emergency and curfew, military terrorism was let loose all over the Tamil homeland, suppressing the agitation with brutal violence. The Tamil leaders were arrested, the Federal Party offices were ransacked and the situation, in the government's view 'was brought under control'. Thus the violence of the oppressor silenced the non-violence of the oppressed; the armed might of Sinhala chauvinism crushed the 'ahimsa' of the aggrieved Tamils. This historical event marked the beginning of a political experience that was crucial to the Tamil national struggle, an experience that taught the Tamils that the moral power of non-violence could not challenge the military power of a violent oppressor whose racial hatred transcends all ethical norms of humanness and civilized behaviour. To the oppressor this event encouraged the view that military terrorism is the only answer to the Tamil political struggle and that the non-violent foundation of the Tamil political agitation is weak and impotent against the barrel of the gun.

In 1965 the United National Party (UNP) assumed political power. The Federal party decided to collaborate with this so-called 'national government' with the expectation of wrenching some concessions for the Tamils. This collaborationist strategy, the Tamil leadership vainly hoped, would bring a negotiated settlement to the Tamil question. The UNP government, in a shrewd move to placate the Tamil nationalists, appointed a senior Federal Party member to its Cabinet and in the following year promulgated regulations defining certain uses of the Tamil language in the transaction of government business. A secret pact was also made between SVJ Chelvanayagam, the Federal Party leader and the UNP leader and Prime Minister, Dudley Senanayake, making provisions for the establishment of district councils.

Neither the regulations for the use of Tamil language nor the promise of decentralisation of political power to regional bodies

were implemented. The communal politics of the Sinhala political leadership never allowed for a mechanism of negotiated settlement. A typical historical pattern was established that when the party in power attempted a negotiated settlement to the Tamil question, the party in opposition invoked anti-Tamil sentiments to undermine the move, thereby scoring political victory over its opponent as champions and guardians of Sinhala 'patriotism'. Caught up in this political duplicity, the UNP government abrogated the pact when confronted with the pressure of Sinhala opposition. Thus, the collaborationist strategy of the Federal Party suffered the inevitable fate of betrayal and, in humiliation, the party withdrew its support to the government in 1968.

JVP's Insurrection

Critical events of far-reaching political significance dominate the pages of Sri Lankan political history during the period from 1970 to 1977. This historical conjuncture marked the reign of an infamous regime constituted by left wing politicians who, under the slogan of 'democratic socialism', brought havoc and disaster to the entire country. This period was characterised by insurrectionary youth rebellion in the south and heightened political violence in the north, denoting the mounting frustration and anger of the younger generations against the repressive state. It was during this period that ethnic contradiction between the Tamils and the Sinhalese became acute with the introduction of a new republican constitution that gave institutional legitimacy to Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony in the island. This eventful period gave birth to the Tamil Tiger guerrilla movement and the growth of the armed resistance campaign of the Tamils. It was during this period that the Tamil national movement opted to invoke the Tamil's right to self-determination and resolved to pursue the path of secession and political independence.

An alliance between Srimavo Bandaranayake's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the traditional old Left, the Trotskyite Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL), brought to political power in 1970 what is mistakenly called the 'Popular Front' government. As soon as the new

government assumed power it was confronted with a Sinhala youth insurrection. In an ill conceived and adventurous attempt to wrench power from the state, the newly formed Marxist militant organisation, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP or People's Liberation Front) rose in rebellion in the south. The rebellion was poorly organised, without a command and control structure, without a coherent policy and strategy. The leadership of the 'revolution' was thoroughly disorganised and lacked any understanding or practical experience in armed revolutionary struggle. Rohana Wijeweera, the JVP's leader was an amateur in the art of armed struggle but ambitious enough to mastermind a major insurrection with the limited textual knowledge gathered from the Russian October Revolution, Mao Zedong's military writings and Che Guevara's notes on guerrilla warfare. While ignoring the objective and subjective conditions of a revolutionary situation, the movement mobilised unemployed militant youth and sections of the landless peasantry for a popular rebellion. Beginning on the 5 April 1971, this sudden uprising took the form of widespread armed assaults on local police stations. Within days, ninety-three local police stations were overrun by the JVP's militant cadres and several administrative districts in the south fell to rebel hands. Though this sudden uprising took the government by surprise, the state machinery took swift counter-insurrectionary measures to contain the situation. State of Emergency and curfews were declared and the government called for urgent military assistance from foreign countries. India, China, Pakistan and Britain rushed in military equipment. India provided a contingent of commandos to protect the capital, Colombo. Armed to the teeth by foreign military assistance and invested with draconian emergency powers, the Sri Lankan armed forces launched a brutal counter-offensive against the young, inexperienced 'revolutionaries'. It was the most barbaric military suppression in Sri Lankan history. To bring the situation under control more than ten thousand Sinhalese youth were mercilessly slaughtered and another fifteen thousand imprisoned. This violent counter offensive campaign wiped out a whole generation of radical Sinhala youth who sincerely believed that a revolutionary insurrection would redeem them from the misery and despair of unemployed existence. The stream of blood that ran from these butchered innocents stained every inch of the acclaimed holy land of compassionate Buddhism.

The shame of history befell on those who masterminded this mass extermination, on those who wiped out thousands of their own children to stabilise their own political power. In this Hitlerian determination to wipe out by brutal force any further rebellion emanating from the oppressed sections, the governing elite enacted Emergency Laws and other repressive legislations and strengthened its grip on state power.

Having violently suppressed the militant Sinhala youth, the new regime turned its oppressive measures towards the Tamils in an attempt to legalise and institutionalise state oppression. The most important measure in this respect was the adoption of a new Republican Constitution, which reaffirmed Sinhala as the sole official language, and conferred a pre-eminent status on Buddhism. The new constitution not only removed the fundamental rights, privileges and safeguards accorded to 'national minorities' under section twenty-nine of the previous Soulbury Constitution, but also made Mr Bandaranayake's racist laws on language and religion as the supreme laws of the land.

Chapter 3, Article 7 of the new constitution stated: 'the official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala as provided by the Official Language Act, NO33 of 1956'. The primacy of Buddhism was accorded in the following words: 'the Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Section 18 (1) (d)'.

The Constituent Assembly categorically rejected all amendments and resolutions proposed on behalf of the Tamil speaking people. A comprehensive federal scheme proposed by the Federal Party was tuned down without even discussion. All efforts to secure a place in the new constitution for the use of the Tamil language ended in fiasco. Sinhala national chauvinism reigned supreme in the deliberations of the Assembly, which resulted in most of the Tamil members of Parliament walking out in utter frustration and hopelessness. This infamous constitution, which was passed on the 22 May 1972, brought an end to Tamil participation in the sharing of state power and created a condition of political alienation of a nation of people.

It must be noted that the major political parties that represented the Sinhala nation, the UNP and the SLFP, have consistently and

deliberately denied the basic political rights of the Tamils. The Trotskyite LSSP and the Communist Party, who championed the rights of the Tamils in the 50s, succumbed to political opportunism in the early 60s and embraced the politics of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism. The persistent arrogance and determination of all major Sinhala political parties to deny them their rights drove home to the Tamils the utter futility of striving for ethnic reconciliation. The political forces of the Sinhala nation converged for confrontation rather than co-existence, and compelled the Tamil people to opt to determine their own political status and destiny. This objective condition led to the consolidation of Tamil political forces into a united national movement to struggle for a common cause. The major event in this direction took place at an all-party conference held at Trincomalee on 14 May 1972 in which the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress and the Ceylon Workers Congress united to form the Tamil United Front (TUF). This unprecedented move demonstrated the unitary cohesion and resolve of the Tamil people to fight to preserve their national identity and political liberty.

Political Violence of the Tamil Youth

Though the leadership of the Tamil United Front (TUF) realised the urgency of unity and collective action based on a pragmatic political strategy, differences of opinion among the leaders prevented them from formulating an action plan. The out-right rejection of the proposals submitted on behalf of the Tamil nation at the Constituent Assembly was a serious matter of concern. It entailed total denial to the Tamil people of any meaningful access in government. It also meant absolute marginalisation of the Tamils from the Sri Lanka political system. The leaders did realise that the political future of the Tamil nation was in serious danger. Yet they could not work out a practical programme of action to advance the struggle to secure the political rights of our people. The following six-point programme adopted at the Trincomalee conference clearly betrays the inadequacy of the political vision of the TUF leadership:

1. A defined place for Tamil language.
2. Sri Lanka should be a secular state.

3. Fundamental rights of ethnic minorities should be embodied in the constitution and made enforceable by law.
4. Citizenship for all who applied for it.
5. Decentralisation of the administration.
6. Caste system to be abolished.

While the Sinhala political parties, with a wider consensus, formulated and promulgated a rigid, entrenched constitution creating a Sinhala-Buddhist autocratic state structure, the Tamil leaders could only work out a few vague demands that fell woefully short of their original goals and failed to address the political aspirations of the Tamil people.

The politically conscious Tamil militant youth became disenchanted with the Tamil leadership for their lack of vision and political inaction. Disillusioned with the political strategy of non-violence, which the Tamil nationalist leadership had been advocating for thirty years and had produced no political fruits, the Tamil youth demanded drastic and radical action for a swift resolution to the Tamil national question. Caught up in a revolutionary situation generated by the contradiction of ethnic oppression and constantly victimised by political brutality, the youth were forced to abandon the Gandhian doctrine of 'ahimsa' (non-violence), which they realised was irreconcilable with revolutionary political practice and inapplicable to the concrete conditions in which they were situated. The political violence of the youth, which began to explode on the Tamil political scene in the early seventies and took organised forms of resistance in the later stages, became a frightening political reality to both the peace-loving, conservative Tamil leadership and to the oppressive Sinhala regime.

The determinant element that hardened the Tamil youth to militancy, defiance and violence was that they were the immediate targets and victims of the racist politics of successive Sinhala governments. The educated youth were confronted with appalling levels of unemployment, which offered them nothing other than a bleak future of perpetual despair. The government's discriminatory programme of 'standardisation' and the racial Sinhala Only policy practically closed the doors to higher education and employment.

Plunged into the despair of unemployed existence, frustrated without the possibility of higher education, angered by the imposition of an alien language, the Tamil youth realised that the

redemption to their plight lay in revolutionary politics, a politics that could pave the way for a radical and fundamental transformation of their miserable conditions of existence. The only alternative left to the Tamils under the conditions of mounting national oppression, the youth perceived, was none other than armed struggle for the total independence of their nation. Therefore, the radical Tamil youth, while making impassioned demands pressuring the old generation of the Tamil United Front leadership to advocate secession, resorted to political violence to express their militant strategy. The political violence of the Tamil youth that manifested in the early seventies should be viewed both as a militant protest against savage forms of state repression as well as the continuation of the mode of political struggle of the Tamils. The most crucial factor that propelled the Tamil United Front to move rapidly towards the path of secession and political independence was the increasing impatience, militancy and rebelliousness of the Tamil youth.

In documenting the historical origin of youth violence in Tamil politics, we should give credit to an organisation that moulded the most militant political activists and created the conditions for the emergence of the armed resistance movement of the Tamils. This organisation was the Tamil Students Federation, which produced the most determined and dedicated youth whose single-minded devotion to the cause of national freedom became an inspiration to others. The most outstanding freedom fighter that emerged from this tradition and became a martyr was a youth named Sivakumaran. The earnestness, courage and determination of this young militant in defying and challenging the authority of the Sinhala state, particularly the repressive police apparatus, became legendary. The revolutionary violence by which he kindled the flame of freedom became an inextinguishable fire that began to spread all over Tamil Eelam.

Political violence flared in the form of bombings, shootings, bank robberies and attacks on government property. A Sinhalese Minister's car was bombed during his visit to the north. An assassination attempt was made on Mr R Thiyagarajah, a Tamil Parliamentarian who betrayed the Tamil cause by supporting the Republican Constitution. An ardent government supporter, Mr Kumarakulasingham, former chairman of the Nallur village council was shot dead. Violent incidents erupted throughout Tamil

Eelam on the day the new constitution was passed. Buses were burned, government buildings were bombed and the Sinhala national flags were burned.

Confronted with widespread violence, which expressed none other than protests and rebellion against oppression, the state machinery reacted with repression and terror delegating excessive powers to the police. Empowered by law and encouraged by the state, the police practised excessive violence indiscriminately against the innocent people and primarily against the Tamil youth. The police tyranny manifested in the horrors of torture, imprisonment without trials and murders. The most abominable act of police brutality occurred on the night of the last day (10 January 1974) of the Fourth International Conference of Tamil research held in Jaffna. It was during this great cultural event, when nearly a hundred thousand Tamil people were spellbound by the eloquent speech of the great scholar from southern India, Professor Naina Mohamed, that grim tragedy struck. Hundreds of heavily armed Sinhala policemen launched a well planned, sudden attack on the spectators with tear gas bombs, batons, and rifle butts, which exploded into a gigantic commotion and stamping resulting in the tragic loss of eight lives and hundreds, including women and children, sustaining severe injuries. The event cut a deep wound in the heart of the Tamil nation; it profoundly humiliated the national pride of the Tamil people. The event betrayed the vicious character of the state police, which, in the eyes of the Tamils, became a terrorist instrument of state oppression.

The reactive violence of the Tamil youth against the terrorist violence of the racist Sinhala state assumed the character of an organised form of an armed resistance movement with the birth and growth of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The Birth and Growth of the Liberation Tigers

The resistance campaign of the Tamil militant youth against the repressive Sinhala state, which manifested in the form of disparate outbursts of political violence in the early seventies, sought concrete political expression in an organisational structure built on a radical political theory and practice. Neither the Tamil United Front

nor the Left movement offered any concrete political venue to the aspirations of the rebellious youth.

The political structure of the Tamil United Front, founded on a conservative ideology, could not provide the basis for the articulation of revolutionary politics. It became very clear to the Tamil people, and particularly to the militant youth, that the Tamil national leaders, though they fiercely championed the cause of the Tamils, had failed to formulate any concrete practical programme of political action to liberate the oppressed Tamil nation. Having exhausted all forms of popular struggle for the last three decades, having been alienated from the power structure of the Sinhala state, the Tamil politicians still clung to Parliament to air their disgruntlement, which went unheard, unheeded like vain cries in the wilderness. The strategy of the traditional Left parties was to collaborate with the Sinhala ruling class and therefore their political perspective was subsumed by the ideology of that dominant class, which was none other than Sinhala- Buddhist chauvinism. This collaborationist politics made the Left leaders turn a blind eye to the stark realities of racist state oppression against the Tamils and led them to ignore the historical conditions generated by the Tamil national struggle; it made them incapable of grasping the political aspirations of the Tamil militant youth.

The Tamil Student Federation, which was formed in 1970, articulated radical politics and encouraged student activists to take up the militant path. The Federation organised massive student protests against the government's discriminatory educational policy of 'standardisation' and arranged seminars and conferences providing platforms to voice protest. Privately, the leaders of the Student Federation encouraged an armed resistance campaign as an effective and revolutionary mode of struggle against state oppression. Driven by the passion for the freedom of their motherland, dedicated young men sought guidance and leadership from the Federation. The leaders of the Federation were capable of verbal inspiration only; they were not prepared to offer leadership and guidance to carry out an effective programme of action. They lacked the knowledge and the courage to organise and spearhead an armed campaign against the repressive state apparatus. Frustrated with the impotency of the leadership of the Student Federation the disenchanted young militants resolved to launch violent

campaigns, individually and as groups. As a consequence, violence flared in the form of political assassinations, bombings, shootings, arson against government property and raids on state banks. The state's security forces, particularly the police, counter-attacked; extreme violence was used against the Tamil militants. Mass arrests, detention without trial, torture and extra-judicial killings became the order of the day. Having learned that the Tamil Student Federation was the organisation that provided encouragement and moral support to the militant youth, the police raided the offices of the Federation and arrested the leaders, including the chairman, Mr Sathiyaseelan. Subjected to intolerable torture, the leaders of the Federation confessed the names of important militant activists engaged in political violence. Faced with the threat of police hunt, the most noted militant activists went underground.

Amongst those driven underground was a dedicated young man passionately devoted to the freedom of his people. He was sixteen years old when he became a hunted fugitive, the youngest of that generation of freedom fighters. He was none other than Mr Velupillai Pirapaharan, the founder and leader of the Tamil national freedom movement - the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Mr Pirapaharan was born on 26 November 1954 in Valvettiturai, a northern coastal town in the Jaffna peninsula. Historically Valvettiturai is renowned for its adventurous seafarers and daring smuggling exploits. But it is also famous for its militant resistance against Sinhala state repression and has produced outstandingly courageous rebels fired with the spirit of patriotism and national freedom.

Mr Pirapaharan is the last child of Vallipuram Parvathy and her husband, Thiruvenskadam Velupillai. He has two sisters and a brother. His father was a government civil servant working as a District Land Officer. He is a man of exemplary character, an affable person with gentle manners, always helpful to the needy and very popular amongst his people.

In his early teens, Pirapaharan, a perceptive and sensitive person, became acutely aware of the oppressive environment in which he and his people lived. He absorbed from various sources - his family, friends, teachers and village elders - the horrendous nature of the racist oppression and the brutal atrocities perpetrated against

his people. These nightmarish stories of persecution aroused intense anger and outrage in the heart of the young Pirapaharan. He felt that his oppressed people should not continue to suffer in silence but should rise up and resist the oppressor. He realised that freedom is a right to live freely in accordance with one's choices, a state of being independent from external coercion or subjugation. He came to understand that freedom is an ideal quality of life to be fought and won requiring, in some instances, supreme sacrifices. Thus, for Pirapaharan as a young rebel, freedom became a passion and the struggle for freedom became an obsession. He lost interest in the course of study at school but was driven to learn more about human freedom and about the history of human struggles for freedom.

The turbulent history of the Indian freedom struggle fascinated Pirapaharan. While Mahatma Gandhi and his mode of political struggle based on the principle of 'ahimsa' attracted the Tamil politicians of that time, two famous Indian rebels who challenged British colonial rule, Subas Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh were far more interesting to him. In particular he admired Subas for forming a national liberation army to launch a military campaign against British rule than the young Sikh rebel Bhagat, who confined himself to underground resistance. Pirapaharan read widely on the life and thoughts of that great Indian freedom fighter. Subas's famous speeches became a source of inspiration to him. Pirapaharan also read Ghandi's works. Though he admired the moral and spiritual values underlying Ghandi's philosophy of 'ahimsa' he was deeply sceptical about its application as a mode of liberation struggle in the Sri Lanka context where the Sinhala state had already revealed its ugly racist face as a callous, merciless repressive apparatus. Pirapaharan was allured by the Indian epic of 'Mahabarata', which related the fascinating story of a great war between the forces of good and evil. Legendary Tamil emperors and their wars of conquest also enamoured him.

Inspired by the lives and works of great Indian national heroes who resisted the alien colonial rule with daring bravery, enchanted by the glorious and heroic exploits of legendary Tamil emperors, the young Pirapaharan made a resolute determination to dedicate his life to the liberation of his people. He knew the risks and perils involved in the life of a rebel fighting against an oppressive regime.

Yet he was prepared to risk death for a common cause of national freedom. His underground life as a wanted fugitive at the age of sixteen turned into a nightmare when the police tightened surveillance in his village and made regular midnight raids on his house. To avoid arrest he was compelled to separate from his family and adopt a solitary life. He drifted like a gypsy, with no permanent place to rest. He hid during the daytime and moved around at night only. He often snatched a few hours of sleep on the roof of temples, in abandoned houses and hidden amongst the foliage on the ground in vegetable gardens. He was tormented by hunger. The difficulties and challenges he faced in these embryonic years of his life as a freedom fighter further strengthened his character and entrenched an iron resolve to carry on with the struggle for freedom.

As a determined young rebel living an underground life and fighting a lonely battle against formidable state machinery, Pirapaharan soon realised the futility of individual acts of political violence. His political contemporaries were, one after the other, arrested by the police and incarcerated. He also felt that some of the 'individual operations' were amateurish and clumsy jobs, which ended in fiasco. Having studied the incidences of militant youth violence, the negative political effects they produced and the oppressive conditions they generated, Pirapaharan realised the urgency and the historical necessity of a revolutionary political organisation to advance the task of national liberation through an organised form of armed resistance. His hope that the leaders of the Student Federation would eventually provide leadership, guidance and an organisational structure for an armed struggle soon crumbled when the leaders showed no inclination to undertake such a revolutionary task. The Federation was finally reduced to political impotency with the arrest and imprisonment of its leaders. Confronting a political vacuum and at the same time caught up in a revolutionary situation which necessitated the creation of a radical organisation to challenge the rising tide of state oppression, Pirapaharan was compelled to make a crucial decision. He finally decided to form an armed organisation under his leadership. It was in these specific historical circumstances; in 1972 the Tamil Tiger movement took its historical birth. At the time of its inauguration the movement called itself the *Tamil New Tigers* (TNT). Later, on 5 May 1976, the members renamed the organisation as the

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Initially the Tamil Tiger movement structured itself as an urban guerrilla unit. Pirapaharan took into its ranks a group of highly dedicated and zealous young rebels who were loyal to it and prepared to die for the cause of freedom of the Tamil people. From the outset the Tamil Tigers functioned as a clandestine underground organisation practicing stringent disciplinary codes of conduct and taking an oath of allegiance to the political cause. Pirapaharan chose guerrilla warfare as a mode of armed struggle since he realised that it would be the most effective form of resistance suited to the objective ground conditions. Learning from the historical experiences of anti-colonial armed struggles in Africa and Latin America, the Tiger leader perceived that the guerrilla form of armed struggle was the classic method that could be adopted by a weak, oppressed nation to resist and fight back the organised military power of a modern state.

The disastrous failure of the JVP's armed rebellion in southern Sri Lanka taught invaluable lessons to Pirapaharan in the art of insurrection. Theoretical models of revolutions and liberation struggles that were successful in other parts of the world could not be adopted and blindly applied in the Sri Lanka context. The specific political and historical conditions and the realities of the local ground situation had to be taken into account. The other issue of crucial importance was training in the use of weapon systems and methods of combat. Though the Tiger movement was formed in the early seventies, Pirapaharan committed a lengthy period of time to train his cadres and organise underground cells. He always resisted foreign training. He rejected an offer given to him for training in Lebanon under the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. He wanted to train his cadres on the local terrain because he knew that ultimately that was where the fighting had to take place. Pirapaharan insisted on well thought out strategy and correct tactics. There was no space for impetuosity or adventurism. From the outset of the armed campaign he has been careful to ensure the safety of his cadres and the survival of the organisation. Even though the Tamil Tigers were involved in acts of armed violence against the state police, informants and traitors, Pirapaharan kept the existence of the organisation a secret. It was not until 25 April 1978 the movement officially claimed responsibility for a series of armed

operations.

The emergence of the Tamil Tiger guerrilla movement marked a new historical epoch in the nature and structure of the Tamil national struggle extending the dimension of the agitation to popular armed resistance. The LTTE soon developed a political and military structure that provided organisational expression to the aspirations of the rebellious Tamil militants who had become disenchanted with non-violent political agitations and resolved to fight back the repressive state through armed struggle. Demonstrating extraordinary talent in planning military strategy and tactics and executing them to the amazement of the enemy, Pirapaharan soon became a symbol of Tamil resistance and the LTTE he founded evolved into a revolutionary movement to spearhead the Tamil national liberation struggle.

Popular Mandate for Secession

While the Liberation Tigers were engaged in organising and developing their politico-military structure, unprecedented events of great historical significance began to unfold in the Tamil political domain. State oppression against the Tamil people deepened and became intolerable. Conciliation and co-existence between the Tamil and Sinhala nations were no longer possible. It was the time when the armed resistance movement of the LTTE emerged as a potential force demanding concrete action from the Tamil political parties. It was in these particular circumstances that, in May 1976, the Tamil United Front convened a national convention at Vaddukodai in Jaffna, where a historic resolution was adopted calling for the political independence of the Tamil nation. SJV Chelvanayakam presided over this crucial assembly where it was decided that the Tamil United Front changed its name to the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). The convention resolved to restore and reconstitute an independent state of Tamil Eelam. This famous resolution was as follows:

‘The First National Convention of the Tamil Liberation Front, meeting at Pannakam (Vaddukodai Constituency) on the 14th day of May 1976, hereby declares that the Tamils of Ceylon, by virtue of their

great language, their religions, their separate culture and heritage, their history of independent existence as a separate state over a distinct territory for several centuries till they were conquered by the armed might of the European invaders and above all by their will to exist as a separate entity ruling themselves in their own territory, are a nation distinct and apart from the Sinhalese and their constitution announces to the world that their Republican Constitution of 1972 has made the Tamils a slave nation ruled by the new colonial masters, the Sinhalese, who are using the power they have wrongly usurped to deprive the Tamil nation of its territory, language, citizenship, economic life, opportunities of employment and education and thereby destroying all the attributes of nationhood of the Tamil people. And therefore, while taking note of the reservations in relation to its commitment to the setting up of a separate state of Tamil Eelam expressed by the Ceylon Workers' Congress as a Trade Union of plantation workers, the majority of whom live and work outside the Northern and Eastern areas.

This convention resolves that the restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of Tamil Eelam based on the right to self-determination inherent in every nation has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil nation in this country.'

The General Election of July 1977 was a crucial testing ground for the secessionist cause of the Tamil United Liberation Front. The TULF asked for a clear mandate from the Tamil people to wage a national struggle for political independence and accordingly the Front explicitly state in its manifesto as follows:

'The Tamil nation must take the decision to establish its sovereignty in its homeland on the basis of its right to self-determination. The only way to announce this decision to the Sinhalese government and to the world is to vote for the Tamil United Liberation Front. The Tamil speaking representatives who get elected

through these votes, while being members of the National State Assembly of Ceylon, will also form themselves into the National Assembly of Tamil Eelam which will draft a constitution for the state of Tamil Eelam and establish the independence of Tamil Eelam by bringing that constitution into operation either by peaceful means or by direct action or struggle.'

In reference to the Tamil national question, the verdict at the elections was particularly critical. The elections were fought precisely on a mandate to create an independent Tamil state. The Tamil people voted overwhelmingly in favour of the mandate electing 17 TULF candidates in the northeast. Thus, the results of the elections placed a serious, irrevocable commitment on the shoulders of the TULF leadership to take concrete steps to establish an independent Tamil state. But the Tamil Parliamentary leaders had neither political vision nor a pragmatic strategy to achieve the goal for which they were elected. They clung to their Parliamentary seats and failed to take any meaningful steps towards the path of political independence.

The general election of 1977 resulted in a massive victory for the right wing United National Party (UNP) under the leadership of JR Jayawardane which secured 85% of the seats in Parliament. The traditional Left parties were completely wiped out without a single seat and the Tamil United Liberation Front, for the first time in Sri Lanka's political history, became the leading opposition party in Parliament. The stage was set for a confrontation: the Tamils demanding secession and separate existence as a sovereign state and the Sinhala ruling party seeking absolute state power to dominate and subjugate the will of the Tamil nation to live free. Soon after the elections, the ethnic contradiction intensified manifesting in the form of a racial holocaust unprecedented in its violence towards the Tamils.

In this island-wide racial conflagration, hundreds of Tamils were massacred and thousands of them became refugees. Millions of rupees worth of Tamil property was destroyed. The state police and the armed forces openly colluded with hooligans in their gruesome acts of arson, looting, rape and mass murder. Instead of containing the communal violence that was ravaging the whole

island, government leaders made inflammatory statements with racist connotations that added fuel to the fire.

This racial violence had a profound impact on the Tamil political scene. While it reinforced the determination of the militant youth to fight for political independence, it exposed the political impotency of the Tamil Parliamentary leadership who, having failed to fulfil its pledges to the people, sought a collaborationist strategy to justify their political life. JR Jayawardane, in his Machiavellian shrewdness, soon realised that the TULF leaders were not seriously committed to the creation of an independent Tamil state but were seeking alternative political solutions. Therefore, the real threat to the Sinhala state, Jayawardane perceived, emerged from the radical politics of the militant youth. The newly elected government therefore utilized all means to crush the revolutionary youth, the very source from which the cry for freedom arose. A ruthless policy of repression was adopted by the new regime, delegating extra-powers to the police and military to clamp down on the Tamil youth. The politics of repression and resistance began to unfold into a deadly struggle intensifying the armed campaign in the Tamil homeland.

LTTE Comes to Light

The political and military significance of the LTTE's armed resistance campaign can only be comprehended by studying various evolutionary stages of its historical growth and development. Tamil police officers and well paid civilian informants comprised a sophisticated state intelligence network, which aimed to crush the Tamil resistance campaign. The intelligence structure posed a serious threat, particularly to the newly emerging liberation movement and hence to the Tamil national cause in general. Hundreds of Tamil militants and politically active students were hunted down, tortured and imprisoned during the counter-insurgency campaign. Inevitably the LTTE, in its formative years, directed its armed campaign against the intelligence network and ultimately succeeded in severely disrupting its structure and function.

During this early stage of the guerrilla campaign the Tamil Tigers killed several intelligence police officers and informants and

quislings. Yet it was a particular armed attack that alarmed the Sinhala state. A police raiding party, headed by a police intelligence officer notorious for the persecution and torture of militant Tamil youth, was wiped out in the northern jungle. On 7 April 1978 acting on information about the location of an LTTE military training camp, a police raiding party headed by Inspector Bastiampillai approached the site deep in the jungle near Murunkan. The police team suddenly surrounded the training camp and held the guerrillas at gunpoint. Though taken completely unawares, the LTTE fighters remained calm. One of the Tiger commando leaders, Lieutenant Chellakili Amman skilfully leapt at a police officer, snatched his sub-machine gun and shot down the police party. Inspector Bastiampillai, Sub-Inspector Perampalam, Police Constable Balasingham and police driver Sriwardane were killed on the spot. The killing of Inspector Bastiampillai was a major blow to the government. The incident created euphoria among the militant youth and signified a courageous episode of armed resistance against the repressive police.

On 25 April 1978 the Tamil Tigers, for the first time, officially claimed responsibility for the annihilation of the police raiding party and the earlier killings of police officers and Tamil informants. The press highlighted the LTTE's claim. Thus the LTTE came to the limelight announcing itself to the world as the armed resistance movement of the Tamils committed to the goal of national liberation through armed struggle. The officially announced list claimed the assassination of Mr Alfred Duraipppah Mayor of Jaffna and the SLFP organiser for the northern region, Mr C Kanagaratnam MP for Pottuvil and some prominent police intelligence officers.

The revelation of the existence of the Tamil underground resistance movement alarmed the Sinhala state. The government reacted swiftly by enacting a law in Parliament in May 1978 proscribing the LTTE. The Act was called the Proscription of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and Other Similar Organisations. This draconian piece of legislation invested the state's security forces with extraordinary powers to crack down on the militants. It created conditions for security forces to carry out arbitrary arrests, detention without trial for lengthy periods, torture and extra-judicial killings. The law also empowered the government to confiscate the

property of any persons who supported the activities of the LTTE. Having proscribed the LTTE the government despatched to Tamil areas several contingents of armed units for the 'Tiger Hunt' and brought the Tamil nation under total military occupation.

Having intensified the military repression in Tamil areas, Jayawardane introduced a new constitution on 7 September 1978 which bestowed upon him absolute dictatorial executive powers and gave Sinhala language and Buddhist religion extra-ordinary status and relegated the Tamil language to second-class status. The new constitution made the President the 'Head of State, Head of Executive and the Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces' with powers to appoint and dismiss the Cabinet of Ministers and to dissolve the Parliament. The new constitution entrenched the unitary structure of the Sinhala state requiring two thirds majority in Parliament and approval of the people in a referendum for amendment or repeal of the constitution. The Tamil nation did not participate in the formulation and promulgation of the new 1978 constitution as well as the earlier 1972 constitution. While the Tamil Parliamentary party failed to organise any mass protests, the LTTE brought Tamil displeasure to the attention of the international community by blowing up an AVRO aircraft, the only passenger plane owned by the national airline on the day the new constitution was introduced to Parliament.

To stamp out the growing armed resistance, the government took repressive measures. On 20 July 1979 Jayawardane's regime repealed the Proscription of Liberation Tigers law and replaced it with the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). This notorious law denied trial by jury, enabled the detention of people for a period of eighteen months and allowed confessions extracted under torture as admissible evidence. Having enacted the law the government declared a State of Emergency in Jaffna, and dispatched to Tamil areas more military units under the command of Brigadier Weeratunga with special instructions to wipe out 'terrorism' within six months. Empowered by law and encouraged by the state Brigadier Weeratunga unleashed unprecedented military terror on the Tamils. Hundreds of innocent youths were arrested and subjected to torture. Several were shot dead and their bodies dumped on the roadside. These oppressive measures caused massive outcry and protests in the Tamil Diaspora. The International Commission

of Jurists and Amnesty International in particular condemned the Terrorism Act. Brigadier Weeratunga's six-month military campaign ended up swelling the ranks of the Liberation Tigers and turned the angry Jaffna population towards the cause of national liberation.

While the Sri Lanka state was intensifying its military domination and repression in the Tamil homeland, the LTTE leadership embarked on a plan of action to expand and consolidate the organisation. To confront the government's counter-insurgency measures, the Tiger leaders decided to strengthen the guerrilla infrastructure and broaden the political wing. The LTTE therefore suspended all hostile armed activities against the state during the years of 1979-1980 and concentrated on the consolidation of the liberation organisation. It was during this time a programme of political action was undertaken to mobilise, politicise and organise the broad civilian population towards the national cause. A powerful international network of LTTE branches was also established in several foreign countries to carry out propaganda work.

The events that have unfolded after 1981 involved intensified military and police repression against the Tamils and increased resistance from the Tamil Tigers against the armed forces.

On midnight 31 May 1981 Sinhala police went on a wild rampage of burning in the city of Jaffna. State terrorism exploded into a mad frenzy of arson, looting and murder. Hundreds of shops were burnt to ashes; the Jaffna market square was set on fire. A Tamil newspaper office and the Jaffna MP's house were gutted. The most abominable act of cultural genocide was the burning of the famous Jaffna public library in which more than 90,000 volumes of invaluable literary and historical works were destroyed, an act that outraged the conscience of the world Tamils. Two Cabinet Ministers, Cyril Mathew and Gamini Dissanayake of Jayawardane's regime who were in Jaffna at the time, planned the episode and supervised the police violence.

An island wide racial conflagration flared up again just three months after the burning of Jaffna, a racial onslaught on the Tamils organised by leading members of the government, assisted by the armed forces and executed by gangs of Sinhala thugs. Hundreds of Tamils were slaughtered, thousands made homeless and millions of rupees worth of property destroyed. The repetitive pattern of this

organised violence that brought colossal damage in terms of life and property to the Tamil people signified the genocidal intent underlying this horrid phenomenon. As a consequence of this heightened repression, Tiger guerrilla resistance increased with such vehemence it threw into disarray the state administrative system in Tamil areas. The LTTE's armed campaign, at that stage, was aimed at paralysing the police administrative structure. Well-planned attacks were directed at police patrols and at police stations effectively disrupting the law and order system that was functioning as a powerful instrument of state terror.

On 2 July 1982 Tamil Tiger guerrillas ambushed a police patrol at Nelliady, a town 16 miles from Jaffna city. In this lightening attack, four police officers were killed on the spot and three others were seriously injured. The LTTE fighters escaped without injury taking the captured weapons with them.

Lieutenant Sathiyathan (Shankar) played a leading role the Nelliady ambush. In a different incident he was shot in a shoot out with the police and on 27 November 1982 succumbed to his injuries in the lap of the Tiger leader Pirapaharan. He was the first martyr in the LTTE. The Tamil people mark the anniversary of his death as Heroes' Day.

The successful commando raid on the well-guarded police station at Chavakachcheri on 27 October 1982 was another major guerrilla offensive that alarmed Jayawardane's government. It occurred just before dawn. A Tiger assault unit arrived near the police station in a hijacked minibus. Some LTTE fighters took up positions to seal off the Jaffna-Kandy Road, while the heavily armed assault unit moved cautiously into the compound of the police station. When the police sentries noticed the intruders the Tiger guerrillas promptly opened machine-gun fire. One sentry was killed on the spot and the others fled with the injured. The LTTE commandos then stormed into the main building amid a hail of bullets. The charge room where the arms and ammunition were kept was the first to come under attack. Two police officers were killed defending their positions. The LTTE fighters broke open the armoury and the strong box and removed 19 repeater guns, 9 rifles, 2 submachine guns, 1 revolver and a huge quantity of ammunition. While one LTTE unit raided the armoury, the other stormed upstairs. Two police officers were gunned down and one officer

leapt from the balcony.

One constable returned fire during the raid injuring two LTTE fighters, including Lieutenant Lucas Charles Anthony (Aseer, Seelan) the commander of the attack unit. Lieutenant Charles Anthony was an outstanding military commander of the LTTE in the early period of the guerrilla campaign. He was a close and trusted friend of Pirapaharan. He was killed in combat at Meesali on 15 July 1983.

The state repression against the Tamils took an ugly turn in the latter part of 1982 when the government used the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act against Tamil intellectuals and clergy. University lecturers, doctors and prominent Catholic priests who were arrested on charges of supporting the armed resistance campaign. Mr P. Nithiyanandan and his wife, Nirmala, both Jaffna University lecturers, Dr Jayakularajah and his brother Reverend Jayatilakaraja, two reputed Catholic priests, Father P Sinnarasa and Father A Singaraya, were incarcerated in the infamous Welikada Prison. Following this incident the LTTE launched a propaganda campaign through their international branches calling for the release of these prisoners of conscience.

The freedom struggle spearheaded by the LTTE came to the international limelight when the organisation, for the first time, submitted a memorandum to the Seventh Summit meeting of the Non-Aligned nations held in Delhi from 7-15 March 1983. The document, titled *Tamils Fight for National Freedom*, explained to the world community the emergence of the Tamil armed resistance of the Liberation Tigers in the following terms:

'The struggle for national freedom having failed in its democratic popular agitations, having exhausted its moral power to mobilise the masses for peaceful campaigns, gave rise to the emergence of armed resistance movement in Tamil Eelam in the early seventies. Armed resistance as a mode of popular struggle arose when our people were presented with no alternative other than to resort to revolutionary resistance to defend themselves against a savage form of state terrorism. The armed struggle therefore is the historical product of intolerable national oppression; it is an extension, continuation and advancement of

the political struggle of our oppressed people. Our liberation movement which spearheads the revolutionary armed struggle in Tamil Eelam is the armed vanguard of the national struggle. The strategy of revolutionary armed struggle was formulated by us after a careful and cautious appraisal of the specific concrete conditions of our struggle, with the fullest comprehension of the historical situation in which the masses of our people have no choice other than to fight decisively to advance the cause of national freedom..... The armed struggle of our liberation movement is sustained and supported by wider sections of the Tamil masses since our revolutionary political project expresses the profound aspirations of our people to gain political independence from the autocratic domination and repression of the Sri Lankan state.'

In the conclusion of the memorandum, the LTTE appealed to the Government of India and the leaders of the Non-Aligned world to support 'the freedom struggle of the Eelam Tamils' and to condemn the genocidal oppressive policies of the Sri Lanka government.

Cataclysmic Racial Upheaval

1983 was a stormy time in the turbulent history of the ethnic conflict, a grim period characterised by increased state repression and intensified rebel resistance. This spiral of violence and counter-violence finally exploded into a cataclysmic racial upheaval. The historians describe this ugly episode as Black July, a horrendous month during which thousands of Tamils were mercilessly exterminated.

In the early months of the year the LTTE stepped up both its military and political activities posing a menacing challenge to the state. There was a series of guerrilla operations against the Sinhala police and the armed forces stationed in the north. On 18 February 1983 a police patrol party was ambushed in which Inspector Wijewardane and his jeep driver Rajapaksa of the Point Pedro police station were killed. On 4 March the LTTE guerrilla fighters

ambushed a military convoy at Umaiyalpuram, Paranthan, destroying an armoured car and seriously wounding five soldiers.

On the political front, the LTTE launched an effective political campaign calling upon the Tamil people to boycott the local government elections to be held in the north on the 18 May as a mark of protest against the state's repressive policies. Mr Pirapaharan, issued a statement appealing to the Tamil people to reject the civil administrative system of the Sri Lanka state and to support the armed campaign of the Tamil Tigers directed towards national liberation. Responding to the mass campaign launched by the LTTE, the majority of the Tamil people in the north staged a mass boycott of the elections. Such a widespread boycott, unprecedented in the political history of the Tamils, constituted a great political victory for the Liberation Tigers. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which defied the LTTE's appeal and stood for the elections, suffered a degrading humiliation and irreparably damaged its political credibility when 95% of the voters rejected the party's appeal to vote at the elections.

On election day, an hour before the polling ended, the LTTE guerrilla fighters attacked the military and police personnel guarding a polling booth at Nallur, Jaffna. In the gunfight that broke out a Sinhala soldier was killed and another soldier and two police officers were seriously injured. Angered by the successful boycott of the elections and the attack on the security personnel, the government imposed new Emergency Regulations empowering the armed forces to take drastic action against the Tamil rebellion. That night a contingent of 600 soldiers deployed within the Jaffna city limits, went on a violent rampage setting ablaze shops, houses, petrol stations and vehicles, looting public property, assaulting and terrorising civilians. It was the second time in two years that the city of Jaffna went up in flames as state terror vented itself against the Tamil population.

June 1983 marked a violent period of heightened state terrorism. The Sinhala armed forces, empowered by Emergency Regulations, went on a wild frenzy in Vavuniya and Trincomalee towns shooting Tamil civilians and setting ablaze shops, houses, schools and temples. Gangs of Sinhala hooligans joined the armed forces in the killing spree in Trincomalee. Nineteen Tamils were butchered, 200 houses, 24 shops and 8 Hindu temples were razed

to the ground. Army personnel rounded up several Tamil youth in Jaffna and shot them dead. A well calculated, state inspired genocidal onslaught on the Tamils had begun. President Jayawardane's statement, 'I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna people ... Now we can't think of them. Not about their lives or their opinion about us,' to Mr Ian Ward, a British journalist, which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* on 11 July 1983, confirmed without doubt that the Sri Lanka state was condoning the systematic extermination of the Tamils by the Sinhala armed forces.

In the context of ethnic repression and intolerable state terror against the Tamil people the LTTE planned a major attack on the Sinhala armed forces. The strike was also planned as retaliation for the irreplaceable loss of the outstanding LTTE military commander Charles Anthony (Seelan) who was killed on the 15 July in combat with the Sinhala troops.

Deeply distressed over the loss of his close confidante Seelan and outraged by the atrocities committed by the armed forces, Mr Pirapaharan undertook the task of working out the entire assault plan. He aimed to impress upon the government that the perpetrators of state violence would not go unpunished. Having secured the necessary intelligence regarding the movement of military convoys at night in the Jaffna metropolitan area, the LTTE leader finally mapped out the famous Tinnaveli ambush. Though he appointed Lieutenant Chellakili Amman as the leader of the assault unit, Mr Pirapaharan commanded the entire operation.

Midnight 23 July. Fourteen battle dressed, heavily armed commandos of the LTTE, including the top brass, Pirapaharan, Chellakili, Kittu, Victor, Pulendran, Santhosam and Appiah, waited in ambush on the Pallaly-Jaffna Road at Tinnaveli, approximately 2 miles from the center of Jaffna city. The road had been mined and sealed off from commuting vehicles and pedestrians. The guerrillas had taken up positions and waited in readiness. The Tigers knew an army patrol would pass at midnight.

An army convoy consisting of a truck and a jeep with a detachment of 15 Sinhala soldiers from the company of the First Battalion of the Sri Lanka Light Infantry based at Mathagal camp, travelled to the ambush site. As the jeep passed, the Tiger commandos pushed the detonating plunger, instantly triggering the landmine. A huge explosion rocked the area. The military jeep was propelled

into the air and fell to the ground in pieces. The following truck came to an abrupt halt. Panic stricken and terrified soldiers jumped out of the vehicle into a volley of gunfire. Pirapaharan, renowned for his sharp shooting, gunned down several soldiers as they scrambled out of the military truck. Confronted with a hail of fire, some soldiers crawled under the vehicle and started shooting back blindly. Hand grenades silenced the return fire.

The ambush was brief and executed with military precision. Thirteen Sinhala soldiers were killed on the spot and two were injured. That was the end of the army patrol unit code named 'Four, Four, Bravo'. It was the heaviest loss of life for the Sri Lanka army during that period. The LTTE suffered one casualty, a major loss. Lieutenant Chellakili, the leader of the attack unit and a freedom fighter reputed for his courage, died in battle.

The killing of 13 Sinhala soldiers at the hands of the Tamil Tigers guerrillas was a severe blow to a racist regime that firmly believed in a military solution to the Tamil question. President Jayawardane was a tyrant and ruled the island with an iron fist. His senior Ministers, Lalith Athulathmudalai, Philip Gunawardane, Cyril Mathew, Gamini Dissanayake were reputed chauvinists committed to a ruthless policy of military repression to crush the Tamil struggle. For a political regime with such a calibre of leadership, the rise of Tamil insurgency causing serious loss of life to Sinhala troops was an intolerable humiliation. The nervous Jaffna population anticipated a swift and harsh retaliation from the military. It came in the form of a military rampage on the following day at Tinneveli and Kantharmadam where frenzied soldiers massacred 60 Tamil civilians. This horrific retaliatory assault in Jaffna was reduced to insignificance when compared to the communal holocaust that rocked the capital and swept across the island causing unprecedented destruction to life and property of the Tamils.

Tamil people had faced frequent outbursts of communal violence in the past. But the July '83 holocaust was unparalleled, qualitatively different in its ferocity, brutality and in its scale of destruction. Most importantly it was not a spontaneous reactive violence to the killing of Sinhala soldiers by the LTTE but rather a well organised, state sponsored pogrom of genocidal proportions. The complicity of the state in this racial violence was evident in the adroit manner in which the government handled the post Tinneveli

ambush scenario. Firstly, inflammatory news reports projected in banner headlines in newspapers the following day, incited hysteria amongst the Sinhalese. Further, the government announced that all 13 'fallen heroes' would be buried at Kanatai, Colombo's main cemetery, with full military honours. These arrangements brought unprecedented numbers of Sinhala people into the heart of the capital. However, the funeral failed to take place as announced. There was a delay in the arrival of the soldiers' bodies at the cemetery. Subsequently, the government announced that the remains of the soldiers would be handed over to the relatives. The crowd was confused and increasingly restless. As the evening grew darker so did the mood and the angry griever turned into an unruly mass that ultimately went berserk, unleashing bloody and brutal violence. The extermination of the Tamils and the destruction of their property were set in motion. The holocaust continued for days, unabated in the capital city and the provincial towns deep in the south leaving a trail of death and devastation. Estimates put a total of 3000 defenceless Tamils savagely murdered. Most were hacked or beaten to death by mobs. Several Tamil families were burned alive. Thousands of Tamil owned homes, shops, buildings, industrial enterprises, cinemas, and petrol stations were razed to the ground. Approximately 150,000 Tamils in Colombo city became homeless overnight and reduced to refugee status. Observers were surprised that the mob violence was neither blind nor indiscriminate, but well organised and co-ordinated. The riotous gangs had precise information concerning the location of Tamil residences, business premises and industrial enterprises. In several instances rioters carried voters lists to single out and identify Tamil persons and their properties, clearly demonstrating the connivance of state officials in the communal upheaval. In the capital alone, over 100 Tamil owned factories and business establishments were gutted. The Financial Times correspondent who witnessed the riots in Colombo observed:

'The violence was vicious and bloody. But what distinguished it from many other communal Asian riots was the way that the mob singled out specific business premises. In street after street in Colombo groups of rioters hit only at factories (as well as homes) owned by Tamils. The careful selectivity is

apparent now. In each street individual business premises were burnt down, while others alongside stood unscathed. Troops and police either joined the rioters or stood idly by....' (Financial Times 12 August 1983)

It became apparent that the July riots were a planned exercise to destroy the economic foundation of the Tamils in the capital city. It was genocidal in its thrust since the mob violence was directed against the life, property and economic existence of the Tamils as an identified ethnic national formation. The communal convulsion continued for six days. Though curfew was declared, the armed forces refused to enforce it.

One of the most abominable episodes during this dark period of Tamil history took place on 25 July at Welikade Prison where Sinhala prisoners, with the collusion of the prison officials and guards, stormed the cells and battered and butchered 35 Tamil political prisoners. Among those bashed, slashed and torn to death by the rampaging criminals were Thangathurai, Kuttimani and Jegan, celebrated freedom fighters, and the founding leaders of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) and Dr Rajasundaram founder, of the Gandhiam Society.

The rioting eventually ended and Colombo appeared as a heavily bombed city of charred, skeletal buildings with smoke spiralling up from the burnt debris. When the Sinhala political leaders eventually broke their silence after the riots, not one had a word of sympathy for the victims of the barbarous outrage. Scandalously, Jayawardane, in his address to the Sinhala nation, implied that the communal carnage was fair retribution for the fallen heroes at Tinneveli. Thus ended a monumental tragic episode that left a deep scar in the collective soul of the Tamil nation, irreparably damaging the relationship between the two communities.

The Sinhala state earned global condemnation. The international community pondered as to how such despicable barbarism and inhumanity could unfold in the serene land of compassionate Buddha. The Indian government was outraged. Mrs Indira Gandhi expressed her grave concern and dispatched her Foreign Minister, Narasimha Rao to Colombo to convey Delhi's deep displeasure. Tamil Nadu ignited. Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated and protested in Chennai and other cities throughout the state.

Tamil Nadu leaders demanded that the central government send Indian troops to protect their brethren in Sri Lanka.

The July racial catastrophe opened the flood gates and Tamil nationalism swept across the continents fanning the flames of ethnic consciousness, identity and fraternity among Eelam Tamils. Fired by the passion of national patriotism, outraged by the unimaginable atrocities, thousands of Tamil youth flocked to join the armed resistance movement. The ranks of the LTTE suddenly swelled into the hundreds while thousands more yearned to join the freedom struggle. Mr Pirapaharan prudently decided not to inflate the strength of his guerrilla formations beyond the limits of the financial resources of the organisation. For the other defunct Tamil groups hiding underground in Tamil Nadu, the new developments offered a golden opportunity for recruitment. With funds from the Tamil diaspora and with new recruits, these groups were resurrected from oblivion.

By unleashing the July genocidal riots the Sinhala racist forces paved the way for the resurgence of Tamil ethno-nationalism and created the subjective and objective conditions for a secessionist struggle. 'Black July' changed the course of political history of the Tamils. It also created the fertile ground for Indian intervention.

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CHAPTER II

INDIAN INTERVENTION IN SRI LANKA

The Negative Critique

The Black July communal holocaust created the necessary space, the right conditions and the rationality for Indian intervention in Sri Lanka. Indian involvement began during the July riots of 1983 and ended in March 1990 with the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) from the island bringing to conclusion a critical and controversial period in Indo-Sri Lanka relations. During this lengthy period of seven years, India's interference assumed different forms at different stages gradually evolving into an extremely difficult and complex engagement. It had political, military and strategic ramifications.

On the political level, the process began as an urgent humanitarian intervention to prevent the genocidal violence unleashed against the defenceless Tamil civilian population. This politico-diplomatic effort soon transformed into a prolonged mediatory exercise lasting nearly four years and ending in the formulation of a bi-lateral agreement, the famous Indo-Lanka Accord. The Accord provided a package of devolution for the resolution of the ethnic conflict. On the military level, the initial interventionist approach consisted of covert operations during which India helped to build-up the armed resistance movement of the Tamils. Military training facilities and arms were provided to the Tamil militant organisations to militarily pressurise the obstinate and reluctant Jayawardane regime to seek a negotiated political settlement to the Tamil national question. In the latter stages, the military involvement became direct and overt with the induction of the Indian

Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to disarm the Tamil Tigers and to implement the obligations of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. Finally, on the geo-strategic level, Indian involvement sought to remove the presence and interference of adverse external forces, which the Indians feared could create conditions to destabilise India's security and strategic environment. This strategic objective was achieved with the inclusion of certain binding clauses in the exchange of letters that accompanied the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord.

For the Indian government this immense interventionist exercise, with all its ramifications, ended up as a diplomatic disaster and a foreign policy debacle. The Indo-Lanka Accord and the behaviour of the IPKF did nothing to contribute to the resolution of the ethnic conflict. Both the Sinhalese and the Tamils, for different reasons, opposed the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord and the presence of Indian troops in the Tamil homeland. The disarming campaign of the IPKF turned into a low-intensity guerrilla war, which brought phenomenal suffering to the Tamil people with heavy loss of life and massive destruction of property. The Indian troops behaved as an occupation army and committed war crimes that shocked the Tamil nation, which had previously looked to India as a guardian and protector.

The presence of the Indian troops and the signing of the Accord generated an explosive situation in the Sinhala south. The militant Marxist movement, the Jathika Vimukthi Peruma (JVP), organised an insurrectionary rebellion against the Sri Lanka state as a protest against the Indian military presence on Sri Lankan soil. When President Premadasa assumed power in 1988, he initiated peace talks with the LTTE and demanded the withdrawal of the IPKF from the island. As a consequence, relations between the governments of India and Sri Lanka soured and came under severe strain. Ultimately the Government of India, under the Premiership of VP Singh decided to withdraw the IPKF. In March 1990 the last contingents of Indian troops withdrew from the island bringing to an end India's highly controversial interventionist episode. This bitter, humiliating historical experience impelled Indian policy makers to adopt a cautious, hands-off policy of non-interference in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Indian intervention in Sri Lanka became a topic for critical elucidation from different sources. The most vehement critiques came

from India. Critical commentaries from Indian academics, political analysts and journalists blamed their own government for 'unwarranted intrusion' into the neighbouring island to sort out an 'internal conflict' and, in so doing, damaging India's image in the world 'as the champion of non-alignment'. Some analysts argued that Indian involvement to contain a major humanitarian crisis of genocidal proportions was unavoidable, yet it should have been limited to political and diplomatic engagement. They severely criticised the induction of the Indian army under the guise of a peacekeeping exercise. Other commentators, mostly Indian journalists, blamed the intransigence of the LTTE leadership and the ingratitude of the Sinhala government, particularly the Premadasa administration, for the failure of the Indian mediatory effort. Some of the military commanders of the IPKF, wondered in their memoirs, how a peace-keeping mission aimed to protect a friendly people turned into a war making exercise resulting in unacceptable casualties to their troops. On the Sri Lanka side there were critical articles, mainly from Sinhala journalists, whose commentaries, heavily prejudiced against the Tamil struggle, blamed India for training and arming Tamil rebel movements and criticised the IPKF for not completing their military mission of wiping out the LTTE guerrillas. Rohan Gunaratna's work entitled 'Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka' is not a serious historical study on the topic but rather focuses on the role of India's intelligence agencies in their 'secret war' against Sri Lanka.¹

On the Tamil side, the LTTE's critique targeted two aspects of Indian intervention. These were areas that directly and adversely affected the Tamil people. One aspect severely censured the IPKF for the atrocities committed against the Tamil civilian population. The other criticised the set of proposals envisaged in the Indio-Sri Lanka Accord for the resolution of the Tamil national conflict. The organisation released wide-ranging critical material on those two issues. The LTTE publication 'The Satanic Force', a voluminous work for which I wrote a lengthy introduction, contains critical commentaries, eye witness accounts, statements by victims of rape and torture, signed affidavits and photographs, all implicating material that exposed the war crimes and the gross human rights violations committed by Indian troops in the Tamil homeland. The LTTE also published papers and documents offering critical

analysis of the inadequacies of the framework of proposals conceived in the Accord. Though factual and based on actual events, the Indian side rejected as 'negative polemics' the LTTE's revelations of the misbehaviour of the IPKF. One Indian commentator characterised the LTTE's publication 'The Satanic Force' as 'an exercise in malevolent propaganda against the Indian army'.²

In the intriguing, complex story of Indian involvement in Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers played a critical role. The state organisers of the July holocaust attributed the Tiger ambush at Tinneveli as the casual factor for the racial calamity that generated the conditions for Indian intrusion. From the outset, the LTTE was one of the Tamil rebel organisations involved in the clandestine Indian programme of military training. Drawn into the play of the Indian politico-military chess game, the Tamil Tigers participated in all the mediatory efforts undertaken by India to resolve the Tamil national question. Ultimately, in the final stages of Indian intervention, the LTTE became the protagonist, the principal party in armed confrontation with the Indian peacekeeping troops, also assumed the role of the chief negotiating party with the Sri Lanka regime seeking to end Indian military occupation. The LTTE's role during this span of history has been complicated and politically sensitive, chartered with risks and danger. Nevertheless, the organisation survived the multiple hazards it faced. It is not surprising that the centrality of the LTTE's role made it the object of negative criticism - primarily from the Indian side - for the politico-military disasters India suffered in the Sri Lanka affair. The bulk of the criticisms have been unfair and biased, based on a misreading of the true intentions and sincere commitments of the organisation. Reputed for its single-mindedness and deep commitment to a set of principles, the LTTE, during those turbulent times, made policy decisions and acted for the purpose of protecting and promoting the interests and aspirations of the Tamil people. Sometimes critical decisions were made, even at the risk of self-annihilation. In this chapter I wish to recount and discuss some critical events and episodes to explain the role and motivations behind the LTTE's policy decisions during these times. As a person directly involved in these affairs, as the representative and advisor to the organisation, my intention is to counter unfair and biased criticism levelled against the LTTE and to record the historical process of events in proper structure and

perspective reflecting the sentiments of the Tamil people.

India's Strategic Concerns

The early 1980's marked the last phase of the Cold War period of the Old World order. It was a tense period of heightened antagonism between the two super-powers. Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan alarmed the Reagan administration. As a consequence, the United States entered into a strategic partnership with Pakistan to contain the sinister designs of the 'Evil Empire' in the central Asian region. Exploiting the close military alliance with the Americans, Pakistan schemed to build-up its strategic capabilities to confront its traditional adversary, India. Meanwhile, fearing Soviet expansionism, China provided military and technical assistance to promote Pakistan's covert war in Afghanistan. India felt insecure with these developments. Bound by a bi-lateral friendship treaty with the Soviet Union following the Chinese invasion, India could not claim to be a non-aligned power. Western powers situated India as an ally of the Soviet Union. When Afghanistan turned into a hotbed of super-power hostility, India became more concerned about the growing military partnership between the US and Pakistan. It was in these circumstances that Sri Lanka opened its doors for the penetration and consolidation of external forces adverse to Indian interests. Suspicious of 'Indian hegemonic designs' the Jayawardane regime turned towards the US, Pakistan, Israel, South Africa and China for arms assistance and military training to repress the Tamil insurgency.

The US operated in co-ordination with Israel and channelled military and technical assistance to Sri Lanka through the Jewish state. An Israeli 'Interest Section' was opened in the American Embassy in Colombo. Israel began to build up the Sri Lanka naval capacity and brought in intelligence agents from the Internal Security Service (Shinbet) to train the Sri Lanka armed forces and, especially the Special Task Force (STF) in counter-insurgency warfare. In the meantime, the US expanded the 'Voice of America' relay station with electronic intelligence facilities in Chilaw, north of the capital Colombo. Furthermore, the Americans also attempted to gain a contract for the Trincomalee oil tank farm through an overseas firm (an American outfit based in Singapore). The visits

of General Vernon Walters, a senior figure in the US defence and intelligence establishments, to Colombo in October 1983 followed by Casper Weinberger, US Defence Secretary, further heightened Indian apprehensions concerning greater American involvement in Sri Lanka. The visits of these two high ranking American foreign policy makers generated suspicion in Delhi as to whether a secret defence agreement between the US and Sri Lanka was being formulated.

Following the July riots, Jayawardane invited into the country, operatives from the Keeny Meeny Service, a mercenary outfit involved in counter-insurgency activities. Having its operational headquarters in the Channel Islands, UK, the Keeny Meeny service provided special training to Sri Lanka's police commandos. Sri Lanka also sought the assistance of Pakistan to train its military personnel. A special unit of Pakistan military instructors, who arrived in Sri Lanka following the July riots, trained a contingent of Sri Lanka troops. Pakistani training created the black garbed 'Black Panthers' or 'Black Devils', infamous for their massacres of Tamil civilians in the east, particularly in Trincomalee.

The growing involvement of the US, Israel and Pakistan and the presence of foreign intelligence operatives and counter-insurgency experts in the strategically important neighbouring island alarmed Delhi. Additionally, China was supplying a substantial amount of military material to Sri Lanka. At that juncture Delhi conceived this steady build up of external forces inimical to Indian interests as a serious threat, to her security and geo-strategic environment. What annoyed Mrs Indira Gandhi, who was at the helm of power in Delhi during that tense period, was the calculated exclusion of India by Jayawardane's regime in seeking military and training facilities from foreign countries. Delhi was indignant with Jayawardane because he completely disregarded India's strategic sensibilities and invited external forces adverse to Indian interests.

Mrs Gandhi had a compassionate understanding and sympathy towards the Tamils of Sri Lanka. From the beginning of the 1980's she was fully briefed on the nature of the racist oppression the Tamil people faced. Apart from the government intelligence and diplomatic sources, Tamil political leaders from Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu had made regular representations about the plight of the Tamils. Mrs Gandhi, a mature and seasoned politician, was

aware of the Machiavellian mindset of Jayawardane and detested his racist policies. The Tamil ethnic issue made the inter-personal relations between the two leaders unfriendly and hostile. Mrs Gandhi was also deeply aware of the strong sentiments that prevailed among the people of Tamil Nadu towards the plight of the Eelam Tamils. Bound by the historical roots of ethnic and cultural affinities, the Tamils of South India and their political leaders were sympathetic and supportive of the aspirations and struggle of the Eelam Tamils.

The communal holocaust of July 1983 and the mass extermination of Tamils provoked an emotional upheaval in Tamil Nadu inflaming the passions of Tamil nationalism in the state. The Dravidian political parties competed with each other in staging mass protests and demonstrations in support of the Eelam Tamils bringing hundreds of thousands onto the streets. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Mr MG Ramachandran, an ally of Mrs Gandhi, demanded urgent Indian intervention. The Tamil Nadu leader called upon the Indian government to request the United Nations to send troops 'to prevent the genocide of Tamils'. The political turmoil and the rising tide of nationalism in Tamil Nadu generated apprehensions in Delhi as to the possibility of a resurgence of Tamil secessionist tendencies. The other crucial factor that compelled Indira Gandhi to intervene in the Sri Lanka affair was the mass influx of Tamil refugees into South India following the July riots. Of the half a million people uprooted by the racial cataclysm, two hundred thousand sought asylum in India and the rest fled to western Europe, Canada and Australia as political refugees. Hence, the ramifications of the July riots precipitated critical conditions in Tamil Nadu compelling the Government of India to take action. Combined with this internal political compulsion was the external factor i.e. the penetration and consolidation of adverse external forces in her backyard island causing serious strategic and security concerns to India. These developments made Indian intervention in Sri Lanka an unavoidable historical necessity. On the issue of India's involvement JN Dixit, former High Commissioner in his work, *'Assignment Colombo'*, observed:

'India's involvement in Sri Lanka in my assessment, was unavoidable not only due to the ramifications of Colombo's oppressive and discriminatory

policies against its Tamil citizens, but also in terms of India's national security concerns due to the Sri Lankan government's security connections with the US, Pakistan and Israel.²³

Mrs Gandhi, who was the chief architect of India's foreign policy determinations at that time, made the historical decision to intervene in Sri Lanka. Her advisors formulated a two-pronged action strategy to achieve two cardinal objectives. It was an overt and covert operation, involving a transparent diplomatic mediatory effort on the one side and a clandestine military exercise to build-up and strengthen the Tamil armed resistance movement on the other. Though mutually contradictory, it was a well-conceived strategy to bring the cunning 'old fox' Jayawardane to his senses. One objective was to bring the island state under the sphere of influence of India by effectively shielding Sri Lanka from the penetration of external de-stabilising forces adverse to Indian interests. Exerting necessary military pressure through the Tamil rebel movements to compel Jayawardane's administration to seek a negotiated political settlement was the second objective.

Mrs Gandhi's politico-diplomatic initiative began soon after the outburst of ethnic violence in 24 July 1984. The brutal nature and the scale of violence unleashed against the Tamil civilians affected her deeply. Her immediate response was to telephone Jayawardane and express her displeasure. On her instructions, the Indian Foreign office released a statement warning Jayawardane that India could not remain unconcerned over the disturbing events taking place in her backyard. On 26 July, as the fury of racial violence continued for the third day, Mrs Gandhi despatched her Foreign Minister, Mr Narasimha Rao, to Colombo as her Special Envoy to study and report on the situation. Jayawardane received the Indian Minister and presented his assessment of events, naturally omitting how the state orchestrated the whole episode. Narasimha Rao's visit was primarily aimed to initiate a mediatory process. Rao conveyed a message from the Prime Minister that India was willing to mediate for a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict, to which Jayawardane agreed. Following Narasimha Rao's visit, Mrs Gandhi appointed Mr Gopalasamy Parthasarathy as India's mediator.

G Parthasarathy was a Tamil Brahmin and a friend of the Nehru family. He was one of Mrs Gandhi's chief advisors on foreign

relations. A brilliant diplomat and tactician, as chairman of India's Policy Planning Committee, he enjoyed Cabinet status. He was popular in Delhi and Tamil Nadu political circles.

To appease the agitated Tamils in both Tamil Nadu and Tamil Eelam, and since he was renowned for his wide political vision and would act to uphold Tamil interests and aspirations, Mrs Gandhi wisely chose him to be the mediator. Having accepted this difficult mission, Parthasarathy visited Sri Lanka on 25 August 1983 and commenced his negotiating process. However, the appointment of a Tamil Brahmin as India's mediator irritated the Sinhala chauvinist elements, particularly the Buddhist clergy, the Sangha, who created serious obstacles to Parthasarathy's efforts. Nevertheless, after extensive discussions with the political leaders of both communities and an indepth study of the issues underlying the ethnic conflict, Parthasarathy formulated a set of proposals called 'Annexure C', which envisaged regional administrative structures devolving power to provincial units.

Jayawardane and his senior Ministers opposed the proposals, yet the government, under Indian pressure, agreed to convene an All Party Conference (APC) to discuss the framework. Tamil political leaders reluctantly decided to participate in the APC knowing full well that it would turn out to be a futile exercise. The conference convened on 10 January 1984 and lasted for one year with 37 sessions being held. During the rounds of discussions Jayawardane allowed all the political parties and groups, including hard-line Buddhist monks, to deliberately complicate the negotiating exercise. At one stage the opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) walked out of the APC, opposing the devolution package. This gave an excuse for Jayawardane to back track from the peace initiative, complaining of lack of consensus. Eventually the mediatory effort initiated by Mrs Gandhi to resolve the Tamil question through negotiations collapsed when Jayawardane's Cabinet, on 26 December 1984, decided to drop the proposals.

From the outset, Mrs Gandhi was sceptical about the probability of success with the mediatory efforts to gain a fair deal for the Tamil people. She was aware that Jayawardane was a hardliner, a difficult and complex personality unsympathetic to the Tamil demand for political rights and freedoms. She also knew that he favoured a military solution to the Tamil issue.

Mrs Gandhi confided her deep distrust of Jayawardane to Parthasarathy during a briefing on his mediatory mission to Colombo. She was doubtful that Jayawardane would do justice to the Tamils and therefore the peace effort might not succeed.⁴ With this foresight, she formulated a two pronged strategy involving a covert military programme to enhance the fighting capacity of the Tamil freedom movement with the calculated objective of frustrating Jayawardane's militaristic approach.

The covert operation was planned and executed by a team of three persons who were close confidantes of Mrs Gandhi and enjoyed powerful positions in India's Defence and intelligence agencies. The principle strategist who masterminded the operation was RN Rao, the National Security Advisor, the person in charge of executing the clandestine exercise was Girish Chandar Saxena, head of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the external intelligence agency of India. The third person was Shankaran Nair, the Director of the Prime Minister's Secretariat who advised Mrs Gandhi on foreign relations. This three-person team under Mrs Gandhi constituted the 'Third Agency' or the Cabinet Secretariat (Security) who made crucial decisions on matters of national security and defence.

Having despatched Mr Parthasarathy on the overt mediatory mission, Mrs Gandhi launched the covert military operation through the 'Third Agency'. The RAW undertook the most sensitive task of organising the military training programme for the Tamil militant organisations.

Indian Training of LTTE Cadres

In mid-August 1983, Mr Pirapaharan, from his guerrilla training camp in the northern jungles of Vavuniya, sent an urgent message to London, requesting my wife Adele and me to return to Madras (now Chennai) immediately. The Tiger leader's message indicated that rumours were afoot in the Tamil homeland that the Government of India had started a covert programme to train Tamil fighters and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) was recruiting large numbers of youths and despatching them across the sea to Tamil Nadu. Describing the Indian initiative as a serious

development, Mr Pirapaharan urged me to go to Tamil Nadu immediately to study the situation and inform him of the real facts. He also indicated that we might be permanently stationed in Chennai this time as Indian involvement had transformed the mode of the struggle. Adele and I had visited Tamil Nadu in 1979 and again in 1981 and spent several months each time working with Pirapaharan and his fighters, the history of which is written in my wife's autobiographical work, *'The Will to Freedom'*. Adele's book also provides details of events and episodes during our stay in Tamil Nadu from August 1983. To avoid repetition, I will only deal with issues pertaining to India's involvement, particularly the relations between India and the Tamil Tigers.

Baby Subramaniam (Illam Kumaran), a senior leader of the LTTE who received us the Meenambakam Airport Chennai, found us accommodation at Woodlands, a modest vegetarian hotel in the heart of the city. Nesan (Ravi) and a few other senior cadres met us at Woodlands. Since the LTTE had no office accommodation or 'safe houses' in Chennai, two adjoining rooms in the hotel became our operational headquarters. Mr Kalimuttu, a senior Minister in Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MG Ramachandran's government, offered to pay the hotel expenses until we found proper office premises. From Woodlands we made enquiries concerning the Indian training project. A Tamil Nadu journalist friend who himself was investigating the matter, advised me to contact RAW officials. In the meantime, an acquaintance, Dr Rajendran, a professor at the Singapore University and an LTTE supporter, visited me at the Woodlands Hotel with firsthand information concerning the Indian training programme.

Dr Rajendran informed me that three Tamil militant organisations, TELO, Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) had already been accepted by the Government of India for the project and were in the process of sending their cadres to military training camp, somewhere in north India. He revealed that RAW was responsible for the programme and the whole clandestine affair was being co-ordinated by Mr C. Chandrahasan, the son of the late Mr SJV Chelvanayagam, the leader of the Federal Party. Dr Rajendran slowly unravelled a hidden strategy by RAW that located Chandrahasan at the helm of affairs in the Tamil freedom

struggle. He commented that Chandrahasan was willing to recommend the LTTE for the training programme, but on one condition. Naturally I enquired from him what the condition entailed. To my utter astonishment and annoyance, he had the audacity to propose that Mr Pirapaharan should accept Chandrahasan as the political leader of the Tamil liberation movement. He further said that all militant groups, after finishing the Indian training, would form the Tamil national army and carry on a guerrilla campaign while Chandrahasan led the political struggle on behalf of the Tamil nation. Adele had been following the conversation. On hearing this proposal she lost her composure. 'Under no circumstances would Mr Pirapaharan or our fighters accept Chandrahasan as their leader. If that's the condition we don't need this Indian training,' she shouted at him. A heated exchange followed. I supported Adele's position. Dr Rajendran arrogantly asserted that the LTTE would never be able to gain access to Indian military assistance without Chandrahasan's influential contacts in the intelligence agency circles and this would have disastrous consequences for the future growth and development of the organisation. He walked out of my room in anger.

I informed Mr Pirapaharan of the role Chandrahasan played and the conditions stipulated for the LTTE to gain access to the Indian training programme. Mr Pirapaharan outrightly rejected both Chandrahasan and the conditions and requested that I establish direct contacts with the Indian intelligence agencies. This posed a real challenge for me. How was I to circumvent Chandrahasan and establish contacts with a clandestine intelligence agency with no 'office' premises in Tamil Nadu? To my good fortune, we moved to a two-bed-roomed flat in Santhome, a suburb of Chennai. The local police and intelligence operatives were quickly informed of the presence of new residents in the locality. The contacts soon led to a meeting with Mr Alexander, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of the Special Branch, Tamil Nadu Internal Intelligence. We subsequently met on several occasions and established a close rapport. He impressed me with his in depth knowledge of Sri Lankan politics and the characters involved. He knew of the covert military training programme and of Chandrahasan's relations with RAW officials.

According to Mr Alexander, Chandrahasan occupied a floor of

the Blue Diamond Hotel in the city and it was from there he operated. He further said that some of the RAW officials involved with Chandrahasan were corrupt and unscrupulous and advised me to avoid contacting them. In fact one of the RAW officials with whom Mr Chandrahasan dealt, Mr Unni Krishnan, was later arrested by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and imprisoned for passing information concerning the Indian training programme to CIA operatives.

I conveyed to him LTTE's concern that they should also have access to the training programme. Mr Alexander advised me to write a comprehensive letter to Mrs Gandhi introducing the LTTE as the authentic armed resistance movement of the Tamils with a long history of guerrilla campaign and stating that the organisation wanted India's military assistance. He further advised me to send a copy of the letter to Mr Saxena, the head of RAW in Delhi.

Within weeks of writing, Mr S Chandrasekaran, a south Indian Tamil holding a top position in the RAW establishment flew to Chennai to meet me. A secret meeting took place in a lodge on the outskirts of the city.

The authorities in Delhi assigned Chandrasekaran to deal with the LTTE and our initial conversation revealed a man determined to fully comprehend the thinking of the movement with whom he would be working. He was an impressive personality. The nature of the questions concerning the LTTE's ideology, political objectives and the structure of the organisation were shrewdly phrased and sophisticated and it was apparent that I was in discourse with a highly intelligent man particularly well informed in the art of covert warfare. Inevitably the subject of Mr Pirapaharan's personality and political vision cropped up in the conversation. After a lengthy discussion he insisted that he should meet him to make arrangements for the training of LTTE cadres in India. He introduced me to a junior official called 'Nayar' as the contact between himself and the LTTE.

The details of this determining meeting with Mr Chandrasekaran, along with my advice for him to come to India to facilitate the arrangements for the training of his cadres, were immediately conveyed to Mr Pirapaharan. He dispatched two of his senior cadres, Mathya and Ragu, to Tamil Nadu to clarify the issue of his safety and freedom. Mathya and Ragu, when we met them in Madurai, were full of suspicion and viewed the offer of training as

a trap by the Indian intelligence agencies to arrest their leader. Mr Pirapaharan was wanted by the Tamil Nadu law and order authorities following his escape from bail after the Pondy Bazaar shooting incident.⁵ I spent several hours, from midnight till morning, explaining to them that no harm would come to Pirapaharan since the Tamil Nadu Police and RAW had assured me of his security in India. Furthermore, I explained, their leader would be safe since the Indian Government had invited him to facilitate a covert military operation. I also wrote a lengthy letter to Pirapaharan giving an assurance of his safety and explaining the necessity of his mission. Mathya and Ragu left for Jaffna immediately carrying my correspondence. The following day I received a message from Tamil Eelam that the Tiger leader would be in India soon. I was relieved and pleased that Pirapaharan was convinced of my assessment and judgement of the situation and decided to come to India.

In October 1983, Pirapaharan arrived in India along with his senior cadres. He was staying in a rented house at a secret location in Pondicherry, a small neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. A meeting was set up between the RAW officials and the LTTE leader. Adele, two bodyguards and I travelled the long journey to Pondicherry. I spent several hours with Pirapaharan relating details of the background events since we landed in Chennai. That night, at around midnight, Mr Chandrasekaran and his associates visited our residence. A closed-door meeting between Pirapaharan, Chandrasekaran and myself took place. An instant rapport was established between the top RAW official and the Tiger leader. Mr Chandran (he wanted us to call him by his shortened name. We referred to him as Mr Moon) offered to train 200 LTTE cadres in two batches of 100 at a time. The first batch would commence in early November. It would be necessary for the LTTE cadres to travel by train to Delhi where they would be met and transported in military trucks to an army complex in Dehra Dun, in the hills of Uttar Pradesh. He requested a complete list of details of the LTTE trainees as soon as possible. Pirapaharan enquired about the nature of the military training and the weapons systems to be provided. Chandran explained that highly skilled Indian military officers would provide the training in all aspects of modern warfare, and the use of small arms to heavy weapons. The training programme would include map reading, mine laying and the use of explosives

and anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapon systems. Chandran made no commitment on the nature of arms assistance that India would provide, but said he would discuss the matter later. At the end of the meeting Mr Chandran invited the Tiger leader to Dehra Dun to observe the training of his cadres.

The Strategy Behind India's Involvement

Pirapaharan was pleased with the meeting he had with Chandran. We avoided raising any controversial issues pertaining to the motivations behind India's offer of military assistance. We wanted to establish a cordial relationship with the hierarchy of RAW. Mr Chandran, knowing that the Tamil Tigers were the most active guerrilla organisation militarily active in Tamil areas, got a detailed picture of the ground situation from the Tiger leader. Pirapaharan also assured him his cadres would be ready for training and that he would also accompany them to Dehra Dun. He carried out his pledge in a short space of time.

Hence, the LTTE became a player in the covert game launched by India. We made a conscious, calculated choice to participate because we had no alternative other than to swim with the currents of an inexorable historical process. The Indian intervention was unavoidable. It was a moral, altruistic urgency and geo-strategic necessity for India to contain a ruthless racist state bent on genocidal destruction of a minority Tamil nation in collusion with international forces with subversive intentions. Yet from the very beginning, we could grasp the motive behind India's action. In this grand clandestine scheme, the Tamil resistance movement had been allocated a specific, limited role. It was purely a military function to destabilise Jayawardane's regime and to frustrate his militaristic approach. The ultimate objective was to militarily compel Jayawardane to seek a negotiated political settlement with the Tamils. The LTTE leadership knew from the advent of Indian intervention that Mrs Gandhi had no intention of staging a Bangladesh type operation to create a separate Tamil state. The Tamil fighters were not given the role of Mukti Bahani' (East Bengali rebels) to create a ground work for an Indian military invasion.⁶ The task assigned to Tamil guerrillas was to pressurise the Sinhala armed

forces to a specific level of intensity until Jayawardane was tamed of his military arrogance. In this strategic plan, Mrs Gandhi envisaged a political settlement within a united Sri Lanka, a settlement that did not infringe the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the island. Having misread India's overall strategy, some political leaders in Tamil Nadu as well as in Tamil Eelam entertained an illusion that Mrs Gandhi was planning a military invasion. Mr Pirapaharan did not have such fantasies. He was conscious of the fact that India was offering military assistance to engage the Tamil fighters as mercenaries to achieve a limited political goal. Even such a politico-military gamble, the LTTE leader was convinced, would ultimately fail because of the stubborn and inflexible attitude of Jayawardane's regime. Though we realised the limited scope and the vulnerability of the Indian effort, we decided to take part in the programme, to be an active player in the process and enhance our military capability. If we did not participate in the Indian project our organisation, in the course of time, would be politically and militarily marginalised and eventually overwhelmed by other militant organisations who opted to receive Indian assistance to expand their manpower and firepower.

On the positive side, the Indian involvement was a morale boost for the Tamil struggle. India's diplomatic engagement with Colombo internationalised the Tamil cause. The news of India's offer of military training created such elation, euphoria and hope in the Tamil homeland it prompted thousands of young men to scramble to join the armed struggle. The young Tamils preferred to join the Liberation Tigers because of their dedication, discipline, achievements and, above all their growing popularity among the popular Tamil masses. But Mr Pirapaharan was not enamoured by the idea of over-inflating the ranks of the organisation by embracing every enthusiastic youth. Already hundreds had joined the movement immediately following the July riots. Pirapaharan was realistic and cautious. For him discipline was the more crucial than expansion. Furthermore, he was a firm believer in the systematic evolutionary growth of the organisational structure, particularly the military. Abnormal expansion, in his view, would cause serious problems of discipline leading to disintegration, a phenomenon that occurred later in the other militant organisations. The Tiger leader's adherence to a strict code of conduct as the basis of recruitment

opened the floodgates of youth to other militant groups. Thus, the Indian covert programme suddenly resurrected to active life all other dormant Tamil groups hibernating in Tamil Nadu. This upset the balance of forces to the disadvantage of the LTTE, which had been active on the ground in Sri Lanka and was evolving systematically into a highly disciplined guerrilla organisation. This sudden, unprecedented expansion of other militant organisations, some of whose ranks enlarged into thousands, posed a serious challenge to the LTTE but Mr Pirapaharan was not seriously disturbed. He had his own scheme to gradually strengthen and expand his liberation organisation in time. The opportunities came in the year 1984 during which period the LTTE underwent massive structural transformation from a small underground guerrilla organisation into a well-organised national liberation army.

The Indian military training to experienced, battle hardened Tiger guerrillas enhanced their skills, knowledge and fighting capability. The LTTE learned from the Indian military hitherto unknown elements of the art of modern warfare. But the scope of the training was limited to only two hundred fighters. The quantity of the arms supplied was small and the quality was very poor. Pirapaharan was deeply disappointed with the weapons systems. Most of the rifles, machine guns and mortars (60mm) were antiquated and unusable, he told me. We realised later that the Indian authorities did not want to provide modern, sophisticated weapon systems. It was a calculated policy to restrain the military capability of the Tamil rebel movement to a particular level of development. For Pirapaharan, who entertained a vision of creating an elite fighting formation with modern weapons systems, the Indian military inputs were totally inadequate. Though disillusioned with the weapons system he felt that the military training was useful. The other major obstacle that frustrated Pirapaharan's yearning to expand and modernise his military structure was the lack of funds. The LTTE was practically bankrupt. We did not get any financial assistance from the Government of India. It was brought to our knowledge that the TELO, EPRLF and EROS were receiving funds from Chandrachud, possibly channelled through RAW. Our situation became critical when we needed additional funds to cater for the new recruits. We were struggling with great difficulty, with little funds obtained from friends and supporters in the Tamil diaspora.

At that time, the international Tamil diaspora was not fully mobilised and organised to backup the liberation struggle. In a situation where other Tamil militant organisations were fiercely competing with each other for dominance and supremacy, the LTTE faced a critical challenge. The organisation desperately needed funds to develop and expand. It was at this crucial juncture, the unexpected happened. We found a great benefactor, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Mr MG Ramachandran (MGR).

The events and circumstances that led to the successful encounter with this all powerful and popular leader and his magnanimous gesture of donating millions of rupees in support of our freedom struggle was given extensive treatment in an article entitled 'MGR and the Tigers' published in my Tamil language book '*Liberation*'. It is suffice to note that the close and intimate relationship developed between the Tiger leader and MGR and the firm political support and huge financial assistance provided by this legendary figure became the cornerstone for the development of the LTTE.

The War of Liberation Escalates

The entrance of MGR into the Tamil liberation struggle with a firm commitment to support the LTTE marked an historical turning point. With the new found availability of seemingly unlimited funds, Pirapaharan's plans transformed into concrete reality. In 1984 the LTTE underwent rapid development and growth expanding its structures into a well-organised liberation force. New military camps were set-up in the remote jungles of Tamil Nadu. A large number of new cadres were recruited. Senior LTTE commanders who underwent special training with the Indian army assumed the role of instructors. Pirapaharan also allocated substantial amounts of money for the development of the political wing. In the meantime, large quantities of small arms and new heavy weapons were procured from the international arms market.

As the trained LTTE fighters returned to their bases in Tamil Eelam, the guerrilla campaign against the Sinhala armed forces intensified. The months of August and September marked the escalation of the war of liberation. More than one hundred military

and police personnel were killed in attacks during those months. Several vehicles, including armoured cars, were destroyed and well-guarded police stations were attacked. These sustained guerrilla assaults in different areas of the Tamil homeland caused confusion, terror and demoralisation among the armed forces. I document below, in chronological order, some of the guerrilla operations by the LTTE fighters during the months of August and September 1984.⁷

On 4 August 1984 at Poligandy, a coastal village near Pt Pedro in the Jaffna peninsula, six navy men on morning patrol were killed and three others seriously injured in an armed confrontation with LTTE guerrillas.

The following morning a military convoy of three armoured cars, one truck and a jeep came under attack at Nediyaadaku, a village near the coastal town of Valvettiturai in the peninsula. Nine police commandos were killed and many injured when the jeep they were travelling in received the full impact of the blast from the landmine hidden on the road. A senior police official, Assistant Superintendent of Police, Jayaratne was among the dead. On the same day a guerrilla commando unit raided the police station at Ottusuddan, a small town about 20 miles from Mulliativu in the northern province killing eight police personnel. The surviving officers fled.

Thirteen soldiers lost their lives on 11 August when LTTE fighters ambushed a military convoy on the Mannar-Poonagarin Road near Vellamkulam in Mannar district.

An assault unit launched a sudden attack on the heavily guarded Valvettiturai Police Station on the 14 August. An hour-long gun battle left several police and military personnel seriously injured.

Eight soldiers died at Karaveddy on 24 August when LTTE fighters ambushed and destroyed an armoured personnel carrier. In another incident on the same day a landmine explosion killed three military mine experts at Atchuvvely in the Jaffna peninsula.

The LTTE military campaign continued and 20 police commandos were killed and more were seriously injured on 1 September when the guerrillas ambushed a police convoy en route at Thikkam, a village on the northern coast. On 10 September fifteen more soldiers were added to the rising armed forces casualty figures when another military convoy was attacked at Semmalai, again

near the town of Mullaitivu.

While the Liberation Tigers intensified their guerrilla campaign and inflicted heavy casualties on the Sri Lankan armed forces, the other militant organisations started to carry out attacks in the latter part of 1984, escalating the Tamil insurrectionary violence. On 21 October 1984 a series of explosions rocked Colombo, causing panic and chaos in the capital. Ten blasts occurred in different locations of the city near important state institutions, killing three persons and injuring scores of civilians. EROS claimed responsibility for the blasts. Armed TELO cadres launched a well-planned attack on Chavakachcheri Police Station on 20 November, killing 24 policemen and completely destroying the building. The ability of the Tamil rebel movements to escalate their violent assaults on the capital alarmed the government.

The intensification of the guerrilla campaign by the Tamil liberation organisations with the active support of the Indian government shook Jayawardane. Yet he remained inflexible and intransigent. He refused to grant concessions to the Tamils even under severe military pressure. Because of the unyielding, hard-line attitude of the Sinhala political leadership, the All Party Conference, which had been deliberating on Parthasarathy's proposals for several months, reached an impasse. India's two-pronged strategy aimed at compelling Jayawardane to pursue a rational path of negotiated settlement, had no effect on the Machiavellian politician who refused to yield. At this critical juncture, an unforeseeable historical tragedy occurred to radically change Indo-Sri Lanka relations: Sikh bodyguards assassinated Mrs Indira Gandhi on 31 October 1984.

The sudden demise of Mrs Gandhi plunged the Tamil nation into deep despair and gloom. The shocking incident devastated all hopes and aspirations of the Tamil people. While the Tamils grieved, raising black flags in their homes and shutting down shops and schools, Sinhala soldiers danced with joy on the streets in Tamil areas. For the armed liberation movement, Mrs Gandhi's death was a severe blow, an irreparable loss of a formidable moral force. As the Tamils feared, change in the corridors of power in Delhi following her assassination had its adverse effects on the Tamil struggle. She was a shrewd, sophisticated politician with a strong personality and had a profound knowledge about the

complexity of the Sri Lanka political scene; an Indian leader sympathetic towards the plight of the Tamil people and determined to secure their rights and aspirations. But most importantly, Mrs Gandhi understood the mindset of Sinhala leaders well and knew how to make them apprehensive with her vague, ambiguous and acrimonious statements. Given the history of Mrs Gandhi's historical role in the creation of Bangladesh, Jayawardane harboured a fear that Mrs Gandhi might launch an invasion of Sri Lanka over the ethnic issue and create a separate state for the Tamils. Commenting on Jayawardane's apprehensions, Mr Dixit noted, 'he often speculated to me that had Mrs Gandhi continued in power she would have broken Sri Lanka to two by 1985.'⁸ Mrs Gandhi's death and the assumption to power of her son, the young, inexperienced, impulsive Rajiv Gandhi, had its negative fallout on Indo-Sri Lanka relations, to the grave disadvantage of the Tamils.

New Administration in Delhi

As soon as he assumed power as the Prime Minister of the largest democracy in the world and the regional superpower in south Asia, Rajiv Gandhi, influenced by new advisors and associates, wanted to effect changes in India's foreign policy. He held the view that his mother's policies towards India's neighbours were aggressive and domineering. Furthermore, he was averse to some of the old guard who had been close to Mrs Gandhi in formulating foreign policy. Rajiv Gandhi did not favour Parthasarathy's cautious and subtle diplomacy. He was impatient and impulsive and wanted concrete results quickly. Because of these contradictory approaches and perceptions, the relations between the two became antagonistic. Subsequently, in the early part of 1985, the role of Parthasarathy in handling the Sri Lanka issue was handed over to the new Foreign Secretary, Romesh Bhandari, a close confidante of Rajiv Gandhi. The new Prime Minister also favoured a radical change of policy towards Sri Lanka. President Jayawardane deeply impressed Gandhi when they met briefly at his mother's funeral. Jayawardane, displaying his charm and shrewd diplomacy, presented himself as a wise old statesman, a devout Buddhist seeking friendship and a harmonious relationship with India. He introduced himself as a friend of Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi from the times

of the Indian freedom struggle. Jayawardane also impressed on him that as a young Prime Minister of a great nation he had a tremendous responsibility in building up friendly relations with neighbours and to ensure peace and stability in the region. Touched by Jayawardane's friendly gesture and wise admonitions, Rajiv told him that the approach of his administration towards Sri Lanka would be fundamentally different from his mother's more partisan attitude. He assured Jayawardane that the new mediatory effort of his government would be neutral and objective. When Rajiv declared that his administration was committed to ensuring the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, Jayawardane was relieved of any apprehensions concerning India's intentions. Thus the groundwork was laid for a new relationship and a new policy orientation towards Sri Lanka. Mrs Gandhi's congenial policy towards the Tamils had come to an end.

In January 1985 I met Parthasarathy at his residence in New Delhi. He sounded dejected and dispirited. Clearly the sudden demise of Mrs Gandhi coupled with Rajiv's cool and indifferent attitude toward him had had a demoralising effect on the aging diplomat. He proceeded to explain to me the new foreign policy perspective Rajiv's administration would adopt. Friendly persuasion instead of assertive diplomacy would be the new approach taken by Delhi, he said. Convinced of Jayawardane's 'good intentions' Rajiv believed that the Tamil issue could be resolved through peaceful means: through negotiations and dialogue. Talks would soon take place involving the Tamil rebel movements and a solution would be found within the unitary structure of Sri Lanka, he further elaborated. Mr Parthasarathy indicated to me that Mrs Gandhi's covert operation would be dropped and a ceasefire would be enforced before the commencement of the negotiations. He confessed that he could not convince Rajiv of Jayawardane's deceitful, duplicitous character. In the end he confided to me that he might not be able to play a determinate diplomatic role in the Indo-Sri Lanka affairs. His advice to the Tamil political organisations was for them to forge a unity, formulate a common programme and to prepare for a difficult and demanding negotiating process with the Sri Lanka state. Mr Parthasarathy also told me that the Indian intelligence agencies would soon brief us on the new policies and approaches of Rajiv's administration.

On my return to Chennai I fully briefed Mr Pirapaharan on the contents of the conversation I had with Parthasarthy. He had been anticipating changes in India's foreign policy following Mrs Gandhi's death, so he was not perturbed to hear of the policy orientation of the new administration. At the same time, he was not in favour of a sudden cessation of armed hostilities at that juncture since he was planning military offensive operations. In the early part of 1985 two major offensive operations were launched against the Sri Lanka forces, one by TELO and the other by the LTTE.

On the night of the 19 January, TELO fighters blasted Colombo bound Yal Devi express train at Murukandy, a small town in Vanni, northern Sri Lanka, in which a contingent of troops were travelling. The explosion ripped through several carriages killing 22 military personnel and 10 civilians. Scores of soldiers were injured. TELO fighters also engaged military reinforcements that rushed to the scene of the explosion.

In the early hours of 13 February, heavily armed LTTE guerrillas launched a sudden attack on the well-fortified military camp at Kokilai, a strategically important coastal town in the Mullaitivu district. The battle lasted more than five hours. One hundred and six soldiers were killed, the heaviest casualties suffered by the army at the hands of the Tigers. Sixteen LTTE fighters died. It was a humiliating military debacle for the Sri Lanka army. Infuriated, Sinhala soldiers launched a retaliatory assault on a Tamil refugee camp near Mullaitivu town killing 52 civilians. When TULF leaders pleaded with India to intervene 'to stop the genocide of Tamils' Delhi maintained a calculated silence. This attitude of indifference indicated a change in India's policy orientation towards Sri Lanka. This new policy, based on the principles of neutrality, non-interference, and negotiated resolution to the conflict was clarified to the LTTE and other Tamil militant organisations when they met the heads of Indian intelligence agencies in the early part of March 1985.

Mr Pirapaharan and I first met Mr Girish Chandra Saxena⁹, the head of RAW, at a secret location in Chennai. Officials of the agency arranged the meeting. An imposing personality, very tall and fair with sparkling eyes, Mr Saxena spoke eloquently in his commanding baritone voice. The meeting was more a monologue than a dialogue; a lecture in which he outlined India's policy and

strategy, past (Mrs Gandhi's) and present (Rajiv's). The Government of India under Mrs Gandhi had serious geo-strategic concerns when Jayawardane invited external forces and agencies inimical to India's interest into the island to crush the Tamil struggle. The July '83 riots escalated to genocidal proportions, forcing hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians to seek refuge in India, inflaming nationalist passions in Tamil Nadu and causing a serious destabilising effect on India's national security. These adverse conditions, Mr Saxena explained, necessitated Indian intervention. The central objective behind India's efforts was to contain the violence against the Tamil civilian populace, restore peace, ethnic reconciliation and, most importantly, stability in the region. He clarified further: the Tamil militant organisations were given military assistance to defend and protect the Tamil civilians and to prevent state military excesses. Mrs Gandhi had never entertained ideas to undermine the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the island. She wanted Jayawardane to give up the military option and to seek a political settlement within a united Sri Lanka. Mr Saxena said that India could not support the Tamil aspirations for a separate state since it would have far reaching implications in a country that had to deal with several secessionist movements. Staring at Pirapaharan, Saxena raised his voice 'You should understand and appreciate India's position,' he declared. The new Prime Minister wanted to build better relations, friendly relations with Sri Lanka, Saxena explained. He would adopt a fresh, new methodology of mediation to initiate a peace dialogue involving all Tamil organisations in a congenial environment of peace and normalcy. Concluding, he said the time was fast approaching for Tamil armed organisations to cease all hostile offensive operations and prepare for talks with the Sri Lanka government under Indian mediation. With that he left: the meeting was over. He made no attempt whatsoever to solicit our views. His junior officials explained that he had to rush to attend another meeting with other Tamil organisations.

Mr Pirapaharan was neither surprised nor disappointed with Saxena's explanation of India's involvement in Sri Lanka affairs. He, however, was not pleased with the Indian proposal for a ceasefire; he felt it to be premature. Pirapaharan assumed that Jayawardane would not concede anything to the Tamils until the

military power of the state had been weakened and its combat ability incapacitated. Furthermore, Pirapaharan viewed Rajiv's assessment of Jayawardane's intentions as fundamentally flawed.

A few days after the meeting with the RAW boss, we had an interesting encounter with Mr MK Narayanan, Director of India's Intelligence Bureau (IB), again at a secret location, but this time in the ancient Hindu city of Kasi. Temperamentally, Mr Narayanan and Mr Saxena were poles apart. Mr Narayanan was affable and accommodative, a charming personality displaying an earnest disposition to listen to others opinions and aspirations. He encouraged us to be open and frank. Explaining the current thinking in Delhi, Mr Narayanan said that Rajiv's administration had innovative ideas on conflict resolution and new approaches to inter-state relations. The centre wanted to create South Asia into a zone of peace and tranquillity, a politically stable region free from the interference of external forces of subversion. India, as South Asia's super-power, had immense responsibilities to create a new order of peace and stability in the region by building friendly relations with her neighbours. With this new vision, Mr Narayanan explained, Delhi wanted to initiate a peace process to secure a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict. The Government of India, he said, expected co-operation and understanding from all Tamil political forces, particularly from the armed rebel movements, in seeking a settlement that would meet the genuine political aspirations of the Tamil people. Mr Narayanan then asked us as to whether we had any reservations about the government of India's new initiative.

Pirapaharan and I explained to him the history of the intolerable conditions of state repression that led to the emergence of Tamil armed resistance. We reminded him that the Tamils were forced to adopt violent methods of resistance against the violence of the state after decades of non-violent agitations premised on Gandhian principles of 'ahimsa'. Pirapaharan explained that the Tamil Tigers did not adulate or idolize violence but were forced to choose it as the ultimate course of action for the preservation of our race and identity. He felt that the people would be grateful and appreciative if India could obtain justice and fair play through peaceful methods. Nevertheless, Mr Pirapaharan went on to express serious reservations about the aims and designs of the Sinhala political leadership irrevocably enmeshed in racist ideology. We conveyed

our serious reservations concerning Rajiv's assessment of Jayawardane's intentions. We warned that the Machiavellian mind of Jayawardane might easily mislead the inexperienced Indian Prime Minister to the detriment of the Tamils.

Narayanan patiently listened to us and said that he understood our suspicions and apprehensions. Ultimately, however, he urged us to extend our co-operation to India's efforts to initiate a negotiated peace process.

LTTE Joins ENLF

From the assessments presented by Parthasarathy and the heads of India's intelligence agencies on the foreign policy determinations of Rajiv's administration, we assumed that India would soon arrange for a ceasefire and political negotiations. Jayawardane, in our calculations, would agree for a cessation of hostilities; he had nothing to lose. Firstly, for a government facing escalating violence from Tamil guerrillas, a ceasefire would have the advantage of easing the military pressure on the state's armed forces. Secondly, the government could adopt a hard-line position during the talks and continue refusing to offer anything substantial to the Tamils. Rajiv's peace project therefore suited Jayawardane's crafty scheme but would have disastrous consequences for Tamil interests. We could foresee an impending conflict of interests between India's new policy projection towards the Sri Lanka state and the aspirations of the Tamil freedom movement.

The emerging scenario posed a critical challenge. The LTTE could not face the new political reality as a separate organisation. The time had come for all the Tamil political organisations to confront the challenge as a collective force. The objective historical conditions of that juncture necessitated a united front of Tamil politico-military organisations. TELO, EPRLF and EROS had already formed an alliance in April 1984 under an umbrella organisation called the Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF). I held the view that the best option open to the LTTE was to join the ENLF, but I had the difficult task of convincing Mr Pirapaharan of the necessity of forging a united front. I impressed upon him the need to formulate a common politico-military strategy for a united

front of Tamil liberation organisations to confront the new developments and challenges arising from the fresh initiatives of the Delhi administration. I explained to him the danger of isolation and marginalisation if we stood alone. If the Tigers were to form an alliance with the ENLF the Tamil liberation movement would transform into a formidable force, an effective, powerful armour confronting the constraints of India's assertive diplomacy. After much discussion, I succeeded in persuading the Tiger leader. With his consent I met the ENLF leaders, Mr Sri Sabaratnam (TELO), Mr Pathmanaba (EPRLF) and Mr Balakumar (EROS), and informed them of our willingness to join the ENLF. I also had extensive discussions with them concerning the formulation of a common political and military programme. Delighted to embrace the Liberation Tigers into their fold, the ENLF leaders requested a meeting with Pirapaharan to discuss the details of a common programme and to sign the 'unity declaration'.

On 10 April 1985 a secret meeting was arranged in a hotel suite in Chennai. I accompanied Mr Pirapaharan to the location to meet the ENLF leaders. Pirapaharan knew Sri Sabaratnam from the early years of the struggle. Balakumar, the EROS leader, had previously met him at the LTTE's political office in Indira Nagar, Adyar, Chennai. The EPRLF leader, Pathmanaba, met Mr Pirapaharan for the first time. The meeting was warm and cordial. The four leaders agreed, without reservation, on the need to chart a joint programme of action. The common political goal was to fight for the independence of the Tamil homeland based on the right to self-determination of our people. A unified military programme, Mr Pirapaharan explained, had to evolve systematically, through co-ordinated action. Until such time each organisation would carry out its own operations against the Sri Lanka armed forces. In view of India's new diplomatic efforts to stage a negotiating process it was decided that the ENLF leaders should meet regularly and discuss developments. Finally, the four leaders signed a joint memorandum pledging to fight for the political independence of the Tamil nation.

From the very day the LTTE joined the ENLF, insurrectionary violence flared up and spread like wild fire, engulfing the Tamil nation. At 10p.m on 10 April LTTE guerrillas launched a massive assault on the well-fortified Jaffna Police Station Headquarters near the Fort military garrison. LTTE fighters took up strategic positions

in front of the police station and pounded the building with rocket and mortar fire. Unable to withstand the fury of the assault, the police personnel fled to the Fort leaving behind their dead and injured. The contingent of troops who rushed to the scene of attack was beaten back by Tiger commandos. The entire police complex, including the headquarters' building and the office of the DIGP, was completely destroyed. The Tiger guerrillas disappeared in the morning, taking with them the huge arsenal of arms and ammunition.

Following the assault on the Jaffna Police Station, each member organisation of the ENLF mounted a series of guerrilla operations on military posts, police stations and army convoys, inflicting heavy casualties on the Sri Lanka armed forces. The months of April and May 1985 recorded the worst incidents of rebel violence. As an Indian commentator puts it:

'Sri Lanka was shaking like an aspen leaf...the spiralling violence in Tamil areas was frightening. Suddenly, coinciding with the LTTE's joining the ENLF, all militant groups - including PLOTE which remained outside the ENLF - appeared to have found a new resolve. They were harassing the Sri Lankan forces almost throughout the length and breadth of the sprawling northeast, as if they were implementing a well-drawn plan to make Colombo kneel.'¹⁰

While the Tamil guerrilla campaign escalated, causing havoc to the Sri Lanka armed forces in the Tamil homeland, the new Indian Foreign Secretary, Ramesh Bandari, made frequent visits to Colombo to secure an agreement with President Jayawardane for ceasefire and negotiations. With military pressure mounting on his security forces, Jayawardane had no alternative but to yield to India's proposal. Nevertheless, Jayawardane agreed to negotiate with the Tamil liberation organisations, only on the conditions that India should forthwith terminate all military assistance to the Tamil rebel movements and force them to relinquish their campaign for an independent state. Having obtained a firm assurance that the Government of India would fulfil his conditions, Jayawardane consented to a ceasefire. Dates for a ceasefire and peace talks were also agreed upon during Bandari's shuttle diplomacy. Cessation of all armed hostilities between the parties in conflict - the Sri Lankan

state and the Tamil rebel movements - was to be implemented from mid-June and peace negotiations to be followed in mid- July. India and Sri Lanka agreed to hold the talks in a third country, the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan.

Driven by deep distrust of Jayawardane's intentions, Pirapaharan and other ENLF leaders were of the view that a ceasefire would be militarily advantageous to the beleaguered Sinhala troops. The sustained guerrilla campaign of the Tamil resistance movement, particularly by the LTTE, would become futile if hostilities were suspended at a peak moment of escalated offensive, without realising the strategic objective of weakening the military power of the state. Pirapaharan and other leaders of the ENLF expressed their reservations and disappointments when they met Mr Chandrasekaran of the RAW at a meeting in Chennai during early June. The ceasefire would provide time and space, the militant leaders argued, for the Sinhala armed forces to re-organise, re-arm and revitalize their combat capability, while the Tamil guerrilla formations would become demoralised from inactivity. Mr Chandran was not in a mood to listen. He said that enough damage had been inflicted on the Sri Lanka forces and further devastation might destabilise the state, and India would not favour such a situation. He further argued that Rajiv Gandhi and Ramesh Bandari had expended a great deal of diplomatic energy to compel Jayawardane to agree to a ceasefire and negotiations. Jayawardane's consent to talk to militant organisations, in Chandran's assessment, was a legitimacy given by the Sri Lanka government to Tamil rebels as authentic representatives of the people. He pleaded with the ENLF leaders to agree to the ceasefire and said the Government of India would not let down the Tamil guerrilla movement if there were any negative consequences. With great reluctance Pirapaharan and other leaders of the ENLF agreed to observe ceasefire if the Government of India ensured the good behaviour of the Sri Lanka forces. On the 18 June 1985 a cessation of hostilities between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil liberation organisations was officially announced.

The ceasefire agreement comprised of four phases denoting periods of time, during which the government of Sri Lanka was obliged to take a series of actions that had to be reciprocated by the rebel organisations, leading to de-escalation and total cessation of

hostilities. Mr Pirapaharan was not satisfied with certain terms and obligations of the ceasefire agreement. The absence in the agreement of guarantees and safeguards to protect Tamil civilians from violence emanating from the armed forces and armed Sinhala settlers displeased Mr Pirapaharan. Furthermore, he argued we should insist that the Government of Sri Lanka submit a concrete framework of proposals for a political settlement. I advised Pirapaharan to represent our views and concerns through the joint leadership of the ENLF. Accordingly we called an emergency meeting of the ENLF on the day the ceasefire was declared and informed the leaders of the Front of our position. There was a consensus of opinion that the ceasefire agreement had serious flaws, which should be brought to the notice of the Government of India. The Front leaders agreed with Pirapaharan's suggestion to request the Government of Sri Lanka, through the good offices of India, to present a comprehensive framework of proposals as a basis for negotiations. This demand would preclude Jayawardane from prolonging the dialogue and evading political solutions, we contended. I agreed to a request from the ENLF leaders to formulate a joint memorandum on behalf of the Front to be forwarded to India. Mr Pirapaharan and the other ENLF leaders signed the document and it was sent to Delhi through RAW officials. Extracts from the joint memorandum stated:

‘We have carefully considered the set of proposals submitted to us by the Government of India to bring about a cessation of hostilities between Sri Lanka’s armed forces and the Freedom Fighters of our Liberation Organisations. Appreciating the mediatory role and the good offices provided by the government of India and accepting the assurances and guarantees offered to us, we, the undersigned Liberation Organisations have made a collective decision to observe ceasefire for a stipulated time to help to create a congenial atmosphere and conditions of normality and to facilitate the Government of Sri Lanka to put forward a package of concrete proposals on the acceptability of which negotiations for a permanent political solution to the Tamil national question can be commenced.

While we agree to suspend all hostilities to a limited span of time, we wish to state that certain terms and conditions outlined in the proposed framework for ceasefire, place us in a disadvantageous position. We wish to outline below some of our suggestions and counter proposals...

We propose that the Sri Lankan Government should present a comprehensive programme for a political settlement following the declaration of ceasefire... We wish to state categorically that the commencement of negotiations is conditional upon our acceptance of this political programme. We have taken this position as a consequence of a long and bitter historical experience of deceptions and betrayals by successive Sri Lankan Governments who have consistently resisted a fair and honourable settlement to the Tamil problem. It is also well known that Sri Lanka had abrogated several pacts and proposals and failed to implement agreements. We should point out that Sri Lanka also adopts an invariable practice of prolonging and postponing dialogues to evade arriving at a practical solution.... We do not wish to be victims of this futile exercise, but rather demand that a concrete set of proposals in a broad framework should be submitted to us for our consideration before deciding to participate in the process of negotiations.'¹¹

The memorandum did not receive a favourable response from the Government of India. Mr Chandrasekaran telephoned me from Delhi to express India's displeasure. The Indian Foreign Ministry was of the opinion, he explained, that the ENLF had attempted to impose an unacceptable condition on the Government of Sri Lanka for the commencement of talks. I conveyed to Pirapaharan how the Indian government viewed the memorandum. An ENLF meeting was convened to discuss the issue and the leaders unanimously decided to stand firm on their demand that the Sri Lanka government submit a concrete set of proposals for our consideration before the commencement of talks. Subsequently I conveyed to Delhi, through Mr Chandrasekaran, the collective decision of the

Front. His response to the decision was hostile and the conversation ended with a warning that all the ENLF leaders, including Mr Pirapaharan, would soon be summoned to Delhi for 'briefing'. In my assessment, open confrontation between the Tamil liberation organisations and the Government of India seemed inevitable.

On 3 July 1985 an Indian military aircraft flew Pirapaharan and myself, along with the other ENLF leaders and their political assistants, to New Delhi where we were accommodated in a five star hotel in the heart of the city. High ranking RAW and Indian Foreign Ministry officials met us and embarked on a lengthy exposition of the difficult diplomatic exercise Ramesh Bandari had undertaken to persuade the Jayawardane regime to agree to enter into a negotiating process with the Tamil rebel organisations. It was a major diplomatic breakthrough for India as well as gaining legitimacy and international recognition for the Tamil resistance movement, a remarkable achievement, the Indian official argued. The theme of the discourse was aimed entirely at dissuading the ENLF leaders from imposing conditions for talks. The crowning episode of our visit to Delhi was the meeting with Mr Saxena at his official headquarters. In characteristic style, the RAW boss bluntly demanded the cooperation of the Tamil rebel leaders with India's genuine efforts to resolve the Tamil ethnic conflict. He warned us that the new Indian government would not tolerate defiance and intransigence and would be compelled to withdraw protective sanctuary for the Tamil militant organisations. 'The talks are scheduled to be held in Thimpu, the Bhutanese capital in two weeks time. The dialogue will be unconditional and if you refuse to attend neither Indian soil nor Indian territorial waters will be made available to you,' he declared, glaring at the cheerless, sombre faces of the Tamil guerrilla leaders. Finally he urged all of us to seriously reflect on what he had said and to come out with a positive decision the next day.

We returned to the hotel and immediately went into confabulations. Pirapaharan was forthright; he had no wish to antagonise India and the ENLF should participate in the peace talks. I supported his position and without reservation the other leaders agreed. The next morning the decision of the ENLF leadership to participate in the peace talks without conditions, was conveyed to the Indian government.

The Thimpu Talks

The peace talks held in Thimpu, the Bhutan capital, comprised two rounds of negotiations. The first round started on 8 July 1985 and concluded six days later on the 13 July. H W Jayawardane, a lawyer and brother of President Jayawardane led the Sri Lanka government delegation. The remaining delegates were either legal experts or bureaucrats.

Since there was no high political representation in the Sri Lankan negotiating team, the member organisations of the ENLF decided to send senior members as their delegates. Accordingly, Lawrence Thilagar and Sivakumaran (Anton) represented the LTTE in the first round, and Yogaratnam Yogi joined the team for the second session. Varatharajaperumal and Katheswaran Loganathan represented the EPRLF. The TELO representatives for the first session were Charles and Bobby and Nadesan Satyendra also attended the discussions the second time. EROS was represented by E. Ratnasabapathy and Shankar Rajee, the two founder members from London. Representing PLOTE were Sidhartan and Vasudeva. The TULF was the exception opting to send A.Amirthalingam, Mr Sivasithamparam and R Sampanthan, its most senior leaders.

As a united front of Tamil liberation organisations the ENLF played a crucial role in the determinations of the Thimpu deliberations i.e. formulation of the agenda and procedures and the debates. The Indian government established a 'hot line' at a secret location in Kodambakam, Chennai to facilitate a communication link between ENLF leaders and their representatives at the venue for talks in Thimpu. Mr Pirapaharan invested me with the responsibility of guiding and monitoring the LTTE delegation and then he left for an LTTE military training camp in Salem. Everyday, until the Thimpu sessions concluded, I and the other ENLF leaders visited the hot-line location for briefings of the sessions and to advise our delegations.

The Bhutanese Government hosted the negotiations and the Foreign Minister of Bhutan, Lyonpo Tsering formally inaugurated the talks. Mr Chandrasekaran and another senior Indian official facilitated the talks. They liaised with both delegations, but were not present during negotiations. With the commencement of the

plenary session, the talks soon turned into verbal warfare between the parties. The Sri Lanka government delegates questioned the legitimacy of the Tamil militant organisations and challenged their claim to be the representatives of the Tamil people. This provoked a nasty, acrimonious debate. Deeply offended by the degrading, verbal assaults, the Tamil organisations unanimously decided that all written submissions at the talks should be signed by all the participant organisations collectively as the 'Delegation of the Tamil people'. The antagonistic and rancorous attitude of the Sinhalese delegation had the positive impact of generating the feeling of solidarity among the Tamil delegates and helped to forge a unity.

Hector Jayawardane, the head of the Sri Lanka delegation, presented a set of proposals, which were nothing other than the defunct District Development Council framework, already rejected by the TULF at the All Party Conference the year before. These proposals demonstrated the lack of seriousness on the part of the government to seek a fair and reasonable settlement. The Tamil delegations rejected the government's proposals and refused to discuss them. Tracing the history of previous talks, agreements and betrayals by the Sinhala leadership, the Tamil delegates argued that it was the unwavering responsibility of the state to offer a meaningful solution to the ethnic conflict 'worthy of our consideration'. The collective voice of the Tamil delegates emphasised that they could only present a guideline of basic principles upon which the government should formulate a comprehensive framework of proposals. The four cardinal principles presented by the Tamil delegation were as follows:

1. Recognition of the Tamils of Sri Lanka as a distinct nationality.
2. Recognition of an identified Tamil homeland.
3. Recognition of the inalienable right of self-determination of the Tamil nation.
4. Recognition of the right to full citizenship and other fundamental democratic rights of all Tamils.

The Thimpu Declaration enunciated as a joint statement by all Tamil delegations on the concluding day (13 July) of phase one of the Thimpu talks further stated:

'Different countries have fashioned different systems of governments to ensure these principles.

We have demanded and struggled for an independent Tamil state as the answer to this problem arising out of the denial of these basic rights of our people. The proposals put forward by the Sri Lanka Government delegation as their solution to this problem are totally unacceptable. Therefore we have rejected them However, in view of our earnest desire for peace, we are prepared to give consideration to any set of proposals, in keeping with the above mentioned principles that the Sri Lankan Government may place before us.'

The second round of Thimpu talks resumed on the 12 August. Hector Jayawardane read out his prepared statement, denouncing all but one of the Thimpu principles. On the principle dealing with citizenship rights he contended that the government would address the issue. Rejecting the concept of a Tamil homeland, he argued that Tamils lived all over the island and Sri Lanka was the homeland for Tamils, Sinhalese and other ethnic communities. He refused to accept the concept of Tamil nationality. Tamils, he argued, did not constitute a nation of people but a minority ethnic group. Defining self-determination as a right entitled only to nations of people under colonial rule, he outrightly rejected claims to the right to self-determination by minorities living in an independent sovereign state. In conclusion he argued:

'If the first three principles are to be taken at their face value and given their accepted legal meaning, they are wholly unacceptable to the government. They must be rejected for the reason that they constitute a negation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, they are detrimental to a united Sri Lanka and are inimical to the interests of the several communities, ethnic and religious in our country.'

The Tamil delegates presented an extensive critique of the 'rigid and inflexible' attitude adopted by the Sri Lanka delegation. They argued passionately in support of the cardinal principles and reiterated that the Tamils constitute a nation of people with an identifiable homeland and, most importantly, the Tamil people have the right to self-determination. The Tamil delegation thus explained:

‘...our demand for self-determination had evolved and taken shape historically through the determined political struggles of our people. We stated that the Tamils of Eelam or Tamil Eelam, constituted a nation with a common heritage, a common culture, a common language, and an identified homeland and further that they were a subjugated people and as such they had the inherent right to free themselves from alien subjugation. It is the right to self-determination that has come to be recognised as one of the peremptory norms of general international law. We stated that in upholding the right to self-determination, we as a people have the liberty to determine our political status, to freely associate or integrate with an independent state or secede and establish a sovereign independent state. We mentioned, however that enumeration of the principles enunciated by us did not entail that we were opposed to any rational dialogue with the government of Sri Lanka on the basis of such principles....

The Sri Lankan Government delegation failed to engage in any discussion concerning the basic framework that we had enunciated. This was despite the circumstances that the members of the Tamil delegation specifically requested the Sri Lankan government delegation to honour that which it had stated in its own statement on 12th August i.e. to engage in a ‘fruitful exchange’ of views.

The Sri Lanka Government delegation presented instead its so-called ‘new proposals’ on 16 August 1985. These ‘new proposals’ are a rehash of the earlier proposals with the right to certain District Councils to function as Provincial Councils. The ‘new proposals’ do not recognise that the Tamils of Sri Lanka constitute a nation. The ‘new proposals’ do not recognise that the Tamil speaking people have the right to an identified homeland. The ‘new proposals’ do not recognise the inalienable right of self-determination of the Tamil people. And finally the ‘new proposals’

do not secure the fundamental rights of the Tamil people.... And accordingly the 'new proposals' fail to satisfy the legitimate political aspirations of the Tamil people...

The four basic principles that we have set out at the Thimpu talks as the necessary framework for any dialogue with the Sri Lankan Government are not some mere theoretical constructs. They represent the hard existential reality of the struggle of the Tamil people for their fundamental and basic rights. It is a struggle which initially manifested itself in the demand for a federal constitution in the 1950s and later in the face of continuing and increasing oppression and discrimination, found logical expression in the demand for the independent Tamil state of Eelam or Tamil Eelam.... We call upon the Sri Lankan Government to state unequivocally whether it is prepared to enter into a rational dialogue on the basis of the framework set out by the cardinal principles enunciated by us at these talks.¹²

As both the delegations took entrenched, uncompromising positions the negotiations reached a stage of impasse. Mutual accusations of ceasefire violations further aggravated the stalemate situation. Just when the negotiating process was on the brink of collapse, Romesh Bhandari stepped in to try to save the situation. Lacking in knowledge of the historicity and complexity of the ethnic conflict and wanting in the skills of mediatory diplomacy, Bhandari blamed the Tamil delegates for their 'inflexible attitude'. Criticising the Tamil side for being entrenched in 'abstract principles' he demanded counter proposals from them. Bhandari's impetuous and imprudent intervention led to a verbal clash between him and Nadesan Satyendra. Bhandari was sharply rebuked and humiliated.

While the peace negotiations were running into stormy weather in Thimpu, we in Chennai received alarming reports of mounting ceasefire violations and large-scale killings of civilians by the Sinhala armed forces in the Tamil homeland. The most serious incidents occurred in Vavuniya and Trincomalee. In Vavuniya on the 16 August scores of civilians were killed and several Tamil shops

burned down when Sinhala troops went on a rampage. The following day, soldiers and armed Sinhala thugs attacked a Tamil village in Trincomalee District and massacred the civilians. These violent incidents and massacres outraged Pirapaharan. As he had anticipated, the Sri Lankan armed forces were openly flouting the ceasefire agreement. The Jayawardane government, the LTTE leader observed at the emergency meeting of the ENLF, was using the Thimpu talks as a smokescreen to cover its hideous genocidal programme. In protest the ENLF leadership decided to boycott the Thimpu talks. It was left to me to convey the message to the ENLF representatives in Thimpu to halt the talks and return to Chennai immediately. On receiving the instructions through the 'hot line' in Chennai all the Tamil delegations walked out of the talks after making the following statement:

'As we have talked here in Thimpu, the genocidal intent of the Sri Lankan State has manifested itself in the continued killings of Tamils in their homelands. In the most recent incidents which have occurred during the past few days more than two hundred innocent Tamil civilians including young children, innocent of any crime other than that of being Tamils, have been killed by the Sri Lankan armed forces running amok in Vavuniya and elsewhere. It is farcical to continue peace talks at Thimpu when there is no peace and no security for the Tamil people in their homelands. We do not seek to terminate the talks at Thimpu but our participation at these peace talks has now been rendered impossible by the conduct of the Sri Lankan State which has acted in violation of the ceasefire agreements which constituted the fundamental basis for the Thimpu talks.'¹³

The collapse of the Thimpu talks was a severe blow to India's mediatory diplomacy. Several reasons could be attributed to this failure. Firstly, India's chief mediator Ramesh Bandari, had none of the skills of his suave and sagacious predecessor, G Parthasarthy, which were crucial for this highly sensitive and complex diplomatic task. He did not understand the very fundamentals of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka nor could he grasp the contradictions underlying the perceptions and attitudes between the Sinhala and

Tamil nations. His impulsiveness and impatience manifested in his expectation of easy and quick solutions to difficult and complicated issues. As an Indian diplomat astutely analysing Bhandari's mindset observed: 'he did not quite comprehend the complexities of the attitudes of the Tamils and Sinhalese towards each other. He was also impatient about the Tamil's insisting on their demands and aspirations... It was this impatience which found expression in his abrasive exchanges with the leaders of the Tamil delegation at Thimpu.'¹⁴ Unfortunately Delhi policy makers backed Bhandari and made decisions on his erroneous assessments. Bhandari gave the impression to Delhi that the Tamil delegates were arrogant and uncompromising.

The second reason is more unpleasant, but nevertheless not untypical of intelligence agencies' strategy. RAW's assertive approach towards the militants, disregarding their political sensibilities was a factor that contributed to the collapse of the Thimpu talks. Essentially the RAW operated with a master-slave attitude towards the Tamil liberation organisations. Having militarily trained, armed and provided patronage to the Tamil organisations, Indian intelligence agencies miscalculated in thinking that they could then be manipulated and controlled like puppets. The Thimpu parleys demonstrated that the Tamil rebel movements had their own political visions and were committed to policies and goals and were not malleable, even under Indian pressure and influence. The organisations were fully conscious of the significance and importance of India's political, diplomatic and military support in their confrontation with the repressive Sri Lanka state and in the struggle for the just rights of their people. Furthermore, they had no wish to antagonise Delhi or to act in a manner prejudicial to Indian interests. Nevertheless, the aspirations of their oppressed nation and their political commitment to the people were uppermost in the ENLF leaders' concerns and they therefore, could not be persuaded to deviate.

Before the entry of the LTTE, in RAW's assessment, ENLF was pliable to Indian influence. Specifically, TELO under Sri Sabaratnam was India's favourite, since unlike the pro-Marxist EPRLF and EROS, it had no ideology. When the fiercely nationalist Tamil Tigers joined the ENLF, RAW assumed, the Front became a formidable politico-military force acting and thinking

independently, in relative freedom from India's sphere of control. The Tigers friendly relations with the Chief Minister MG Ramachandran and their popularity in Tamil Nadu and Tamil Eelam, contributed to the independence and clout of the ENLF, the Indian Intelligence outfit assessed. Though heavily dependent on India's support and sympathy, the Tamil militant organisations proudly regarded themselves as freedom fighters, not mere instruments to serve India's scheme of things.

The Sri Lanka chief negotiator, Hector Jayawardane, adopted a hard-line, inflexible attitude, which was the third important reason for the failure of the talks. Hector represented a regime that had neither the political will nor the genuine intention of addressing the Tamil aspirations and resolving the ethnic conflict amicably. As a constitutional lawyer he always argued within the parameters of Sri Lanka's constitution, insisting on and upholding the unitary structure of the law of the land. He was uncreative, rigid and unsympathetic to Tamil demands. As Dixit aptly puts it: 'HW Jayawardane's entire negotiating approach was mechanistically legal and even wooden. He kept on emphasising that responding to Tamils demands would be ultra vires of the constitution of Sri Lanka, that the unitary nature of the Sri Lanka republic cannot be eroded.... The Thimpu talks became the dialogue of the deaf'.¹⁵

The breakdown of the talks following the boycott by the Tamil delegation, we assumed correctly, would irritate Delhi. As such, we anticipated some form of punitive action.

RAW had monitored the 'hot-line' conversations and viewed my role in conveying the leadership decisions to the delegates at Thimpu as the reason behind the collapse of the talks. Mr Unni Krishnan, a senior RAW operative, informed me that Delhi was displeased over my instruction to the ENLF team to boycott the talks. Subsequently, Indian punitive action was metered out to me in the form of a deportation order.

In the afternoon of 23 August 1985 the Tamil Nadu Police swooped down on my flat in Besant Nagar, Chennai and took me into custody: the following day I was deported to London on an Air India flight.¹⁶ Deportation orders were also served on Chandrahasan and Nadesan Satyendra. Sayendra had already left for London. Thus Delhi expressed its displeasure: it conveyed the message to the Tamil rebel movements that India's benevolence was not

everlasting.

Delhi's partisan action came under heavy criticism from the Indian media. One Indian newspaper characterised it as 'hasty and imprudent action'. The Tamil Nadu political leaders blamed Rajiv and Bhandari for being 'insensitive to Tamil sentiments' and organised massive protests. Pirapaharan and other leaders of the ENLF demanded my return to India and refused to participate in further negotiations until such time. These factors compelled Rajiv's administration to revoke the deportation order and I flew back to India six weeks later.

The Bangalore Talks

In March 1986 Romesh Bhandari retired as a dejected diplomat, having failed in his mediatory mission to find a solution to the protracted ethnic conflict. AP Venkateswaran succeeded him as the Indian Foreign Secretary. Venkateswaran was neither a close confidante of Rajiv Gandhi nor was the chemistry between the two congenial. Determined to continue the mediatory effort irrespective of the earlier failures, Rajiv chose his two most trusted Ministers of State, P Chidambaram and Natwar Singh as special representatives of the Government of India to engage President Jayawardane in peace talks.

The summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-Operation (SAARC) was to be held in Bangalore during mid November 1986 where the Prime Ministers of India and Sri Lanka were scheduled to meet. It was a major diplomatic event where Rajiv wanted to announce a breakthrough in the ethnic conflict as a significant achievement in his foreign policy towards a neighbouring country. P Chidambaram, the Minister of State for Internal Security and Natwar Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs were given the responsibility of formulating a reasonable framework of proposals to meet the political aspirations of the Tamil people.

P Chidambaram and Natwar Singh visited Colombo at the end of April 1986 and stayed for four days in the capital engaging the President and his senior Ministers, Laith Athulathmulathali, Minister of National Security, Gamini Dissanayake, Minister of

Mahaveli Development, ACS Hameed Minister of Foreign Affairs. During several rounds of extensive discussions with the Sri Lanka political leaders, the Indian mediators found strong resistance and opposition in Colombo to the central demand of the Tamils for the recognition of an indentified homeland. Jayawardane and his Ministers vehemently opposed the merger of the northern and eastern provinces into a single contiguous territory.

Following the Indian Ministers' visit, Jayawardane summoned the Political Parties Conference (PPC) in late June to deliberate on the ethnic issue. On the Tamil side only the TULF participated in the conference. The major opposition party (the SLFP), boycotted the meeting. The deliberations, which lasted nearly four months, produced a set of proposals providing limited devolution of powers to the Tamils provinces. The proposals denied fiscal powers, land rights and law and order administration to the Tamils. The core demands of the Tamils were rejected. All the Sinhala political parties participating in the conference rejected the fundamental Tamil demand for the recognition of the Tamil homeland, and the creation of a new unit, merging the north and east into a single linguistic territory for the Tamil speaking people. The PPC ended in a debacle and faced a similar destiny as its predecessor, the All Party Conference.

Jayawardane operated with a two-pronged strategy of peace and war. He continued to mislead India and the world by adopting dilatory tactics, staging one conference after the other as if he was genuinely committed to resolving the Tamil issue. Meanwhile, he entered into secret deals with Pakistan and Israel to receive substantial military assistance to build up his war machine. Furthermore, by engaging India in a peace effort he almost succeeded in blocking the military and political support Delhi gave to the Tamil liberation organisations. He created a rift between Rajiv's administration and the Tamils by engineering the peace dialogue in such a manner as to convince Delhi that the rebel organisations were inflexible and intransigent. While generating contradictions and hostilities between the Tamils and India through peace negotiations he continued to expand and modernise the armed forces for major offensive operations to crush the Tamil freedom movement. Rajiv was unaware that the crafty old Sinhala leader was leading him up the garden path.

Compelled to present a peace package to Rajiv during the Bangalore Summit of the SAARC scheduled for 17 and 18 November 1986, President Jayawardane conceived a set of fresh proposals, which came to be known as the 'trifurcation of the Eastern province'. It was a cleverly worked out demarcation programme by Jayawardane's administration to dismember the eastern province on ethnic and religious grounds, aiming to negate the Tamil demand for a single, unified linguistic territory. Under this project the boundaries of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai districts would be redrawn to carve out three regions for three ethnic communities - the Tamils, Muslims and the Sinhalese - living in the eastern province. In this scheme Sinhala areas of Amparai would be de-linked and amalgamated with the Uva Province. Trincomalee city and harbour and the Sinhala settlements in Trincomalee would constitute a Sinhala region to be administered by the Sinhala government. Portions of Batticaloa and sections of Amparai predominantly inhabited by Muslims would be demarcated as a Muslim region. Tamil majority areas in Trincomalee (minus the city, harbour and Sinhala settlements) and a portion of Batticaloa would be redrawn into a Tamil province. This shrewd demarcation scheme would create three provinces for the three communities, with the Sinhalese securing large swathes of territory in the east, including the strategically important Trincomalee harbour and city. The demarcated Tamil region of the East, Jayawardane envisaged, would be linked to the north. That was his response to the Tamil demand for the northeast merger. Explaining to the Indian High Commissioner, Mr Dixit the details of his trifurcation scheme, Jayawardane claimed that his 'improved' proposals were built on the suggestions made by Chidambaram and Natwar Singh that the Muslim and Sinhala interests in the east provinces should be ensured. He further told Dixit that he would present these 'fresh' proposals to Rajiv at the Bangalore summit. Dixit was not pleased:

'I frankly told him that both the Government of India and Tamils will perceive this proposal as a way to circumvent the Tamil demand for a linkage of the northern and eastern provinces and to have this united Province acknowledged as a 'Tamil homeland'. I expressed the fear that his Tamil protagonists would view this as a motivated tactical exercise.'¹⁷

Jayawardane and the senior ministers of his cabinet were all opposed to the Tamil demand for a homeland constituting a merged northeastern province. The aim of the Sinhala government was to dismember the east, dislocate the territorial contiguity of the Tamil region and to appropriate more Tamil land through Sinhala colonisation. Dixit's assessment was correct: this devious demarcation plan was totally unacceptable to the Tamils. Nevertheless, Jayawardane persisted and was unprepared to modify his proposals to meet the demands of the Tamils. He planned to present this trifurcated scheme as a proposal for an interim arrangement. Though realising the inadequacies of Jayawardane's proposal, Rajiv's administration was determined to present it to the LTTE as a basis for negotiations at Bangalore in November 1986.

Since the breakdown of the Thimpu talks and my deportation from India in 1985 and leading up to the Bangalore summit, several pivotal events unfolded in the Tamil struggle. Crucially, the ENLF, the front of Tamil liberation organisations, disintegrated and brutal armed confrontation between two alliance members, the LTTE and TELO erupted in Jaffna in April-May 1986. The TELO leader, Sri Sabaratnam and many of his fighters were killed during the heavy fighting. The EROS leader Balakumar continued to maintain friendly relations with the LTTE leadership. The EPRLF turned hostile toward the LTTE and was forced to demobilise. Under pressure from the LTTE, the PLOTE announced that they would cease all military operations in the Tamil homeland. In other words, by the time of the SAARC Summit in Bangalore, the LTTE had emerged as the most formidable politico-military organisation, the only determining force in the Tamil freedom movement. In its mediatory efforts the Indian Government had no alternative other than to deal with the leadership of the Tamil Tigers. Knowing the extraordinary character of the LTTE leader and particularly his tough, unyielding and resolute frame of mind, the Indian establishment looked for an opportunity to chasten or rather 'discipline' him before planned peace talks in Bangalore. The opportunity came on 1 November, the day of the Hindu festival of lights (Deepavali) when an ugly violent incident occurred in front of the EPRLF's political office at Choolaimedu in the heart of the city of Chennai. Douglas Devananda, a former senior cadre of the EPRLF (now a Minister in the Government of Sri Lanka) went berserk after an

argument with an Indian auto rickshaw driver and indiscriminately sprayed bullets from his automatic rifle, killing a young lawyer and seriously injuring ten other civilians.

The incident caused shock and outcry in Tamil Nadu. The Indian media demanded punitive action against Tamil militant organisations operating in Tamil Nadu. Rajiv's administration wanted the Government of Tamil Nadu to take stringent action against the militants. He advised MG Ramachandran to discipline the militants and enforce strict law and order as the SAARC Summit was soon to be held in the capital of the neighbouring state of Karnataka. In these circumstances, Mr Mohanadas, the Deputy Inspector of General Police (Intelligence) launched his 'Operation Tiger' to disarm the Tamil rebels. In the early hours of 8 November 1986, Tamil Nadu police swooped on the 'safe houses' and training camps of the LTTE and other groups, arrested the leaders and confiscated weapons.

Pirapaharan and I were arrested in our homes and taken to different police stations and subjected to humiliating treatment. We were photographed, finger printed and interrogated like common criminals. After several hours of detention we were taken back to our residences and kept under house arrest. It was a calculated move by the Indian authorities to harass, humiliate and subdue the Tamil militant leader. But in the case of Pirapaharan it worked to the contrary. The Tiger leader became angry, defiant and more determined to resist Indian intimidation and pressure. This so-called 'Operation Tiger' we realised, was not simply a punitive action by the police for a shooting incident at Choolaimedu in which the Tigers were, in any case, not involved. Rather, the operation constituted a grand plan worked out by the centre and state governments with the political intention of subduing the Tiger leader to make him malleable to the Indian mediatory peace strategy. We were able to fathom the undercurrent of this strategy when Pirapaharan and I were taken to Bangalore on 17 November for 'proximity talks' after nine days of house arrest.

An Indian Air Force plane took us from Thamparam Airbase on the outskirts of Chennai to Bangalore, where we were accommodated in the Raj Bhawan Hotel. When we arrived tired at 10p.m. a team of Indian negotiators were waiting to engage us in serious dialogue. We were introduced to Minister of State for

External Affairs, Natwar Singh, the Foreign Secretary, Venkateswaran, Joint Secretary, Kuldeep Sahdev and the Indian High Commissioner, Mr Dixit. They immediately proceeded to present a detailed elucidation of Jayawardane's trifurcation scheme for the eastern province. During the deliberations we were informed that the Indian Prime Minister and the Sri Lanka President had already arrived in Bangalore and were staying at the Hotel Windsor Manor. President Jayawardane, we were told, was willing to talk to us if we accept his proposals as an interim arrangement for a specific period of time until a final settlement was reached on the ethnic conflict.

Using a detailed map of the eastern province, Mr Dixit attempted to explain to us that the trifurcation scheme would ultimately lead to the 'unification of the Tamils in the north and east. It was an interim arrangement for a specific period, subject to further discussion and improvement,' he said. After a lengthy exposition of Jayawardane's proposals through the mid-night hours, the Indian High Commissioner gazed at the tired and resentful guerrilla leader and asked for his response. As I anticipated, Pirapaharan made a sharp, crisp statement. 'The Tamil homeland is one and indivisible and we will not allow Jayawardane to dismember it,' he declared. On hearing my translation of Pirapaharan's comments from Tamil into English, Dixit's face dropped. I explained to him the dangers and pitfalls behind Jayawardane's scheme and impressed on him that neither the LTTE leadership nor the Tamil people would ever accept his proposals. Realising that Pirapaharan could not be shaken from his resolute and determinate position Mr Dixit called upon the Foreign Secretary Venkateswaran to speak to us.

Venkateswaran spoke to us in Tamil in a very polite and courteous tone, noting that we were tired and irritable. Mr Dixit, he said, had intimated to him our position on Jayawardane's scheme. Subsequently, he did not attempt to elaborate on the proposal. He opened up the dialogue by stating that Rajiv Gandhi was earnestly concerned about the plight of the Tamils and sincerely interested in finding a reasonable solution to the ethnic conflict. Rajiv was optimistic, according to Venkateswaran, that he could persuade Jayawardane to meet the aspirations of the Tamils. The proposals presented by the government of Sri Lanka attempted to address to some level the Tamil demand for a Tamil linguistic region, in his

view. It was only a provisional arrangement to be subjected to further improvement; he went on to explain. He further said that if we accepted the interim arrangement it would be a diplomatic achievement for the Indian Prime Minister. He pleaded for our co-operation to make the SAARC Summit a success for Rajiv. In conclusion, he urged us to reconsider our position and to make a positive decision. Pirapaharan was annoyed. 'Are you requesting us to betray the cause of our people just to please Rajiv Gandhi and to promote his personal glory?', the Tiger leader retorted angrily. Venkateswaran got the message. He was slightly taken aback. He apologised saying that he understood our feelings. Following Venkateswaran, Natwar Singha approached us. I explained to him the negative implications of Jayawardane's trifurcation project and reiterated our firm stand. He understood the rationality behind our position and did not make any attempt to persuade us. It was almost four o'clock in the morning when the brainstorming session ended and we were permitted to retire to our rooms.

Our firm rejection of the proposals did not deter Rajiv Gandhi from attempts to persuade us otherwise. He flew in the LTTE's mentor and friend, Mr MG Ramachandran (MGR), the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. The Prime Minister assumed that MGR's clout might convince the LTTE leader.

We met the Chief Minister the following evening in a suite at the Raj Bhawan. His aide and confidante, Tamil Nadu Minister, Pandurite Ramachandran, attended the meeting also. During an hour of engagement we were able to convince MGR of the negative implications of the Sri Lanka proposal. We explained how the trifurcation plan was in stark contradiction to the Tamil demand for a contiguous homeland and that vast stretches of land would be carved out to the benefit of the Sinhalese. MGR's shrewd mind immediately understood the subtleties of the proposals. He lamented as to why the central government of India, particularly the Prime Minister, could not grasp the ramifications of the proposal. Appreciating our stand as rational and realistic, the Chief Minister assured us that he would not exert undue pressure on us. Thus ended the proximity talks in Bangalore.

Realising the futility of trying to wear down Pirapaharan's resolute stand, we were finally allowed to return to Chennai. However, the Government of India was displeased with the LTTE

leadership. The breakthrough so fervently anticipated by Rajiv Gandhi turned out to be another diplomatic debacle in the mediatory exercise. Jayawardane's address at the conference added to Rajiv Gandhi's annoyance when he used the Summit forum to lash out and condemn India's covert assistance to 'Tamil terrorism' in violation of the SAARC principles of 'non-interference and co-existence'. The Indians were severely embarrassed. This humiliation turned into hostility towards the LTTE. Delhi decided to register its deep displeasure to Pirapaharan and to impress upon him that India's patronage should not be taken for granted. Within days of our return to Chennai, Tamil Nadu secret police under DIG Mohanadas staged a lightening raid and confiscated all the vital communication equipment from LTTE's offices and training camps. Pirapaharan was suddenly deprived of communication with all major guerrilla bases in Tamil Eelam and he was furious with the centre and state governments of India. The Tiger leader operated his command and control structure from Chennai and the sudden severance of communication crippled him militarily. Our desperate efforts to contact MGR were of no avail. We were told that he was in Salem and could not be contacted.

Finding no other possible means of retrieving his confiscated communication equipment, Pirapaharan made a dramatic decision to fast-unto-death. No amount of pleading would change his mind: his decision was firm and irrevocable. He had an uncanny belief that his action, though risky, would succeed and he began his fast-unto-death protest in my residence at Indira Nagar, Adyar, Chennai.

Soon after he started his fast I summoned a press conference to announce his non-violent protest. The Indian media gave wide publicity to the event. Some newspapers wrote critical editorials condemning both the state and central governments for penalising the Tamil Tigers to 'placate a racist regime'. The fasting episode turned swiftly into a major political controversy. The central and state governments denied involvement in the affair, shifting the blame to the Tamil Nadu Police.

Chief Minister MGR eventually contacted me on the phone and requested me to advise Pirapaharan to give up his fasting with the assurance that he would instruct the police to handover the communication sets. The LTTE leader remained adamant, insisting on the return of the equipment before relinquishing his fast. In the

meantime, my residence was engulfed with people - journalists, politicians, LTTE cadres, sympathisers, supporters and the inquisitive public.

It was, in my view, the India media and the opposition politicians who made the situation uncomfortable and embarrassing for the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister. Furthermore, he was averse to the prospect of undermining his special relationship with Pirapaharan and damaging his image as the patron of the Eelam struggle. However, what concerned him most was the serious political consequences that would have arisen had Pirapaharan continued his fast till the end. MGR was further humiliated when the Indian Minister P Chidambaram issued a statement claiming that the central government was not aware of the seizure of the LTTE's communication equipment. Irritated by these events the Chief Minister ordered the Tamil Nadu Police to return the LTTE's wireless sets. Only when the police handed over the confiscated sets did Pirapaharan break off his fast of forty-eight hours.

A few days later, when Pirapaharan had sufficiently recovered, MGR invited us to meet him and we had a cordial exchange of views. As he promised during the discussions, the arms and ammunition seized from all the Tamil militant organisations (including the LTTE) were handed over to the Tigers. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's unexpected move encouraged a Sinhala political analyst to speculate thus:

'Mohanadas was not correct in stating that the arms were returned to the militants. The arms were returned only to the LTTE, which received even the arms seized from the other groups. This led many to believe that the swoop was designed by the Chief Minister to strengthen the LTTE and weaken the other groups.'¹⁸

Pirapaharan admired the exceptional qualities of MGR: his generosity, humaneness, his sensitive understanding of the plight and struggle of the Eelam Tamils and his valiant support for the armed resistance campaign of the LTTE. Nevertheless, while appreciating the extra-ordinary role and contributions made by this powerful legendary figure, the Tiger leader felt deep unease about the growing aggressive diplomacy of Rajiv's administration. Furthermore, following the harrowing, humiliating experience at

the hands of the Tamil Nadu police and the fasting episode, Mr Pirapaharan realised that he could not rely on India's patronage forever. As an advocate of self-reliance, he deeply felt that his liberation movement would be severely constrained from charting a free and independent course of action as long as he had sanctuary on Indian soil and was exposed to Indian arm twisting diplomacy. Subsequently, Pirapaharan made arrangements to leave Tamil Nadu. In early January 1987 the Tiger leader clandestinely crossed the Palk Strait and returned home to Jaffna. He requested my wife and I and other senior political cadres to remain in Tamil Nadu and carry on with the political work.

Operation Liberation

1987 constituted a momentous and turbulent period of extraordinary events and violent episodes in the stormy political history of Sri Lanka. In the early months of the year, the violence of the armed forces and the counter violence of the Tiger guerrillas escalated the intensity of the conflict. The stepped up LTTE guerrilla campaign coupled with the increasing casualty rate of the government forces alarmed and agitated Jayawardane and he desperately sought ways and means to strengthen his military machine for an all-out offensive against the Tamil resistance movement. He distrusted the earnestness of the Indian mediatory effort, which, in his assessment, had failed to tame the Tigers. With the rapid growth of the military power and combat capability of the LTTE he suspected that the central government of India and the state government of Tamil Nadu were backing the Tamil Tigers, both militarily and financially. Jayawardane therefore, while giving the impression of participating in Rajiv's mediatory efforts, solicited arms supplies and military training from Pakistan, Israel, America and China. As he strengthened his armed forces for an invasion of Jaffna, which had been brought under LTTE control, the President also imposed an economic blockade on the northern province as collective punishment against the Tamils for their support for the armed struggle. Furthermore, during this period, he expanded the Special Task Force (STF), an elite force comprising police commandos and sent senior officers to Israel and Pakistan for special training. In the

early months of the year, high-ranking United States military officials from the Pacific Command visited Colombo to advise the Sri Lanka military hierarchy on counter-insurgency operations. Steadily and cautiously, Jayawardane built up his military machine in preparation for a major offensive in the Jaffna Peninsula. It came in the early hours of 26 May 1987.

A massive invasion force of eight to ten thousand troops, supported by tanks, heavy artillery and air cover unleashed a brutal assault on the Peninsula under the code name 'Operation Liberation'. The strategic design of the first phase of the offensive was to bring the Vadamarachchi region of the Peninsula, 'the heartland of the Tigers' in the army's calculation, under Sri Lanka military control. Sinhala troops moved swiftly along the coastal belt, while Sri Lanka Air Force fighter planes and naval gunboats indiscriminately pounded towns and villages. LTTE fighters tactically withdrew from Vadamarachchi and planned counter offensive guerilla attacks once the troops moved into the interior. With Air Force and Navy support and without resistance from the LTTE, the invading troops advanced, committing heinous crimes, massacring civilians, destroying homes, temples and schools. The ancient historical coastal towns of Vadamarachchi were reduced to rubble. Within a week, the Sri Lanka army had overrun the area, hundreds of civilians were killed and thousands of Tamil youth had been rounded up. Hundreds of these young men were massacred, while others despatched to various prisons in the south of the island. The offensive was intended to inflict maximum devastation in terms of life and property and to infuse terror amongst the Tamils. Jayawardane proclaimed his sinister motives when addressing an opening ceremony of a bank in Colombo. 'This time the fight is a fight to the finish', he declared.

Following the fall of Vadamarachchi, the Sri Lanka armed forces prepared to invade Valigamam region of the Peninsula and Jaffna city, the cultural capital of the Eelam Tamils. Jayawardane had already given instructions to his field commanders 'to raze Jaffna to the ground, burn the town and then rebuild it'.¹⁹ The Sri Lanka military hierarchy had briefed the President that at least ten thousand Tamil civilians would be killed if an all-out invasion was launched against the heavily populated Valigamam and the city of Jaffna. Nevertheless, Jayawardane was determined to carry out the

offensive operation.

The ruthless military campaign of the Sri Lanka government alarmed Delhi. Rajiv Gandhi was shaken by the sudden outbreak of hostilities and the brutal behaviour of the Sinhala armed forces heavy casualties on Tamil civilians. The callous attitude of President Jayawardane and his disregard of an Indian warning conveyed through a diplomatic channel, further disturbed the Indian Prime Minister. In the meantime emotions ran high in Tamil Nadu over the inability and powerlessness of the central Government of India to prevent the genocidal military assault on the Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu politicians demanded Rajiv's intervention to prevent the starvation of the Jaffna Tamils suffering under Colombo's economic blockade. It was in these circumstances the government of India decided to ship urgently needed relief supplies to the civilian population of Jaffna. On 3 July 1987 a flotilla of 19 trawlers loaded with 40 tones of food supplies set sail for the Jaffna Peninsula from Rameswaran in Tamil Nadu. Jayawardane was furious. He instructed the Sri Lanka Navy to intervene and block the Indian vessels carrying the supplies. Sri Lanka gunboats turned backed the flotilla after six of hours wrangling in the middle of the sea. The Sri Lanka government also issued a statement saying that the civilian population of Jaffna did not 'require any assistance from any outside source as the Government of Sri Lanka is capable of meeting all requirements'.

Sri Lanka's bellicose response to Indian's humanitarian gesture irritated Delhi. Rajiv Gandhi wanted to impress upon Jayawardane that India was deadly serious in her warning that she might not hesitate to intervene, if necessary militarily, to safeguard the Tamils from genocidal onslaught. To impart to Sri Lanka such a strong message, India decided to airdrop the humanitarian relief supplies to the starving population of Jaffna. On 4 July 1987 five AN-32 transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force escorted by Mirage fighters, dropped 25 tonnes of relief supplies in Jaffna. The Sri Lanka government was warned that any attempt to interfere in the exercise would be crushed. This Indian humanitarian intervention created a strong outcry in Colombo. The Sri Lanka foreign Ministry registered a strong protest condemning the airdrop as a serious violation of its territorial integrity and an undue interference in the internal affairs of the country. The positive aspect of the airdrop was that it

sent a strong message to Colombo of the danger of Indian military intervention if Sri Lanka continued its onslaught against the Tamils. Fearful of provoking Indian wrath, Jayawardane suspended his military offensive operations in Jaffna. The Sri Lanka government also agreed to allow Indian relief ships to bring urgent humanitarian supplies to the Jaffna Peninsula through Kankesanthurai harbour.

In the meantime, LTTE guerrillas had begun infiltrating back into the regions captured by the army and stepped up a counter offensive campaign. There had been several ambushes and landmine attacks on the patrolling troops in Vadamarachchi inflicting heavy casualties. The most devastating attack was launched on the night of 5 July when the LTTE, for the first time, inducted its Black Tiger suicide unit against the Sri Lanka army. Captain Miller, the first Black Tiger, drove a lorry load of explosives into the military headquarters of the Sri Lanka troops housed in Central College buildings at Nelliady and detonated the lethal cargo. The force of the explosion flattened the buildings and instantly killed hundreds of soldiers. Shaken by the event, President Jayawardane and the military hierarchy suppressed the true casualty details fearing demoralisation of the armed forces. But the Indian intelligence establishment was pleased when it learned of the high rate of casualties through their reliable sources. An Indian intelligence official told me in Chennai that as a consequence of this devastating assault, Jayawardane could be brought to the negotiating table.

The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord

India's aggressive gesture, in violation of Sri Lanka's airspace, and the LTTE guerrillas' devastating counter-attack on the military headquarters, subdued Jayawardane and his hawkish Ministers and they became amenable to Indian mediatory efforts. There was intense diplomatic activity both in Colombo and in Delhi to work out a bi-lateral agreement between the Governments of India and Sri Lanka, incorporating a package of devolution to resolve the ethnic question. The Indian High Commissioner, Mr Dixit, who played a crucial role in the formulation of the Indo-Lanka Accord, devotes an entire chapter, nearly forty pages of his book, *Assignment Colombo*, under the title 'Birthpangs of Accord'

describing how the Agreement was formulated. In this extraordinary story of the genesis of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement and the architects behind its creation, Mr Dixit mentions an intriguing episode. He says an LTTE representative based in Singapore conveyed a message containing a set of proposals as a basis for compromise and negotiated settlement, to Mr Ram, then editor of Hindu newspaper. The proposals included (a) secession of military operations by the Sri Lanka Army, (b) the merger of the North and East as the Tamil homeland, (c) devolution of power based on proposals discussed between 1983 and 1986, (d) Tamil should be recognised as an official and national language, (e) an interim administration should be instituted before final settlement and, (f) Tamils should be given proportional representation in the Sri Lanka armed services. According to the message received by Ram, if the above conditions were met, the LTTE would give up its demand for secession, commit itself to a ceasefire, and the agreement embodying the proposals should be signed by the Sri Lanka government and by the Government of India on behalf of the Tamils.²⁰ This message, in Mr Dixit's rendering, was conveyed to Ram over the telephone when he was in Singapore on his way to China. Ram passed the message to the Sri Lanka government through his friend Gamini Dissanayake, the then Minister of Lands and Mahaveli Development, says Dixit.

According to the former Indian High Commissioner the draft framework of the Indo-Lanka Agreement was formulated through intense discussions and mutual consultations between Delhi and Colombo, based on the alleged LTTE proposals. The crucial question is, did the LTTE present a set of proposals or demands as a compromise formula? Is there any truth in the reported story of an anonymous person operating in Singapore as the representative of the LTTE conveying a framework of proposals to an Indian journalist through the telephone? For the purpose of documenting the true history of the Tamil people's struggle it is crucial that I set the record straight on the authenticity of this intriguing story. I have to state, categorically, that the LTTE was not in anyway involved in this incredulous episode. I was closely associated with Pirapaharan in all matters pertaining to Indo-LTTE affairs, particularly the peace negotiations, and I can say with certainty that the LTTE leadership was not even aware of this alleged transmission of a message

claiming to contain proposals from our liberation organisation. If such a transmission of ideas had taken place, why is it that they were never mentioned in our discussions on the Accord when Pirapaharan and I met Rajiv Gandhi prior to the signing of the Agreement? Furthermore, Mr Dixit and Mr Ram are experienced professionals who are well aware of the necessity of checking sources, particularly telephone messages. One would have expected either Mr Ram or Mr Dixit, or both, to clarify the authenticity of the telephone message with the LTTE leaders, if they considered the contents important enough to form the basis for the working out of a settlement to the ethnic issue and for a bi-lateral agreement between states. Crucially, however, it is the content of the proposals, which raises questions as to the credibility of the story. Anybody familiar with or engaged in relations with the LTTE would immediately question the content of the ideas. Some of the proposals attributed to the LTTE are totally incompatible with its principles and policies. Most importantly, there is a deliberate omission of the cardinal principle of the right to self-determination in the alleged LTTE proposals. All this points to the likelihood of a planted story by interested parties, particularly the Indian intelligence agencies, to gain a breakthrough in the stagnated peace process and to reach a bi-lateral agreement with Sri Lanka.²¹

The Indo-Lanka Accord was a joint product of the Governments of India and Sri Lanka. It was formulated and finalised through deliberations between representatives of Rajiv's and Jayawardane's administrations. Neither the Tamil nor the Sinhalese public was involved. It was neither discussed in the Indian Parliament nor in the Sri Lanka Parliament. How the LTTE leadership was introduced to this crucial Agreement that affected the political destiny of the Tamil people is a bizarre story.

On 19 July 1987 Mr Hardeep Puri, First Secretary (Political) at the Indian High Commission in Colombo paid a sudden visit to Jaffna and requested a meeting with the LTTE leader. Pirapaharan, accompanied by Yogaratnam Yogi, met the Indian delegate. Without specifying any details, Mr Puri informed the Tiger leader that a package of proposals had been formulated between the governments of Sri Lanka and India and that the Indian Prime Minister wished to meet Pirapaharan in Delhi to clarify and explain matters. When Pirapaharan and Yogi asked for a further elaboration

of the proposals, the Indian diplomat refused to comment and said that all matters would be clarified in Delhi. Realising that the matter was urgent and extremely important and not wishing to reject the invitation of the Indian Prime Minister, Pirapaharan agreed to go to Delhi. The Tiger leader insisted that I, as his political advisor resident in Chennai at the time, should also accompany him.

On July 23 two Indian military helicopters landed on the grounds of Suthumalai Aman Temple near Jaffna, picked up the LTTE delegation comprising of Pirapaharan, Yogaratnam Yogi and Thileepan and flew to Meenambakam Airport. In the meantime the Tamil Nadu Police informed me of their arrival and I was taken to the airport to meet them. At the airport Pirapaharan informed me that the Indian Prime Minister had invited them to discuss the details of a framework of proposals, about which he had no knowledge. Puri was tongue-tied when I asked him about the new set of ideas. His only comment was that the Indian High Commissioner would explain the details in Delhi. We later boarded an Indian Air Force plane and arrived in the Indian capital a few hours later.

From the airport we were taken to the Ashok Hotel in the heart of the city. As our vehicles entered the gates of the prestigious hotel we noticed black uniformed Indian military commandos (Black Cats) in large numbers guarding the hotel premises. Noticing a sense of curiosity and concern on our faces, Mr Puri told us that for our protection the hotel had been placed under tight security. The entire top floor of the hotel, including a suite, was allocated to us and well-armed Black Cats had taken up positions in front of our rooms. At the hotel a RAW officer informed us that we were placed under safe custody and we could not leave the hotel or allow anybody in. The telephones on our floor were also disconnected, he said. To our amazement we realised that under the guise of 'safe custody' the Indian government had placed us incommunicado, surrounded by an elite force of Black Cats. Pirapaharan confided to me: 'Bala Anna, I'm trapped again'.

Soon after we arrived at the hotel, Mr Dixit visited us. His face was grim and serious. Sitting on the sofa in the suite, he pulled out his pipe, lit it and puffed out the smoke a couple of times. Seated in front of him, we watched him attentively, anticipating clarifications. 'A bi-lateral agreement has been reached between the Governments of India and Sri Lanka. The Indian Prime Minister,

Mr Rajiv Gandhi will visit Colombo soon to sign the agreement. This agreement offers a fair and reasonable solution to the Tamil ethnic question. You should accept this agreement,' Mr Dixit declared. He took a copy of the Agreement out of his pocket and handed it to me. 'Please translate this document for Mr Pirapaharan. I'll be back in two hours time. I hope you'll be ready with a positive response by then,' he told me. Having said that, he got up and briskly walked out of the room.

I translated the document into Tamil and explained the implications of the proposals. We found the proposals in the Agreement limited and inadequate and some provisions vague and ambiguous. While emphasising a pluralist structure of Sri Lanka society, the Agreement recognises the distinct 'cultural and linguistic' identity of various ethnic groups thereby rejecting the conceptualisation of nation and nationality. While ensuring Sri Lanka's 'unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity' the Agreement recommends a solution within the unitary constitution. The only positive element in the proposals was the recognition of the northern and eastern provinces as 'areas of historical habitation of the Sri Lankan Tamil speaking peoples...' The cardinal feature of the Agreement was merger of the northern and eastern provinces into a single administrative unit. But the merger itself was interim to be subjected to a referendum allowing the ethnic communities in the east to decide over a permanent link with the north. The Agreement allows for the formation of a temporary Northeast Provincial Council with a Governor, Chief Minister and Board of Ministers. The powers and functions of the Provincial Council were not specified. Rather a set of proposals negotiated between 4 May 1986 and 19 December 1986 between the governments of Sri Lanka and India and the TULF leaders were recommended as the basis for settlement. 'Residual matter not finalised during these above negotiations shall be resolved between Indian and Sri Lanka within a period of six weeks of signing the Agreement.' It should be noted that these proposals called the *December 19th Framework* were criticised and rejected by the LTTE in the written response submitted to the Government of India in January 1987. The Agreement, therefore, fails to deal with any core issues critical to the Tamil question. The most important aspect that affected the LTTE was the issue on de-commissioning. The Agreement stipulated that all Tamil militant

organisations should be disarmed within 72 hours of the signing of the Accord. Pirapaharan's face turned red when I translated this particular clause. Within the time frame of two hours allocated to us Pirapaharan made a firm, resolute decision. He resolved not to accept the Indo-Lanka Accord under any circumstances.

Two hours later Mr Dixit returned. He enquired as to whether we had made our decision. We told him in precise terms that we could not accept the Agreement. He demanded an explanation. I pointed out the limitations in the proposals, arguing that they fell far short of Tamil aspirations. The framework proposed in the Agreement was totally unacceptable to the LTTE, I said. Pirapaharan argued that it was unfair and unreasonable on the part of the government of India to disarm the Tamil freedom movement before reaching a permanent political solution with guarantees security to our people. 'How can India ask us to give up our arms within 72 hours. These weapons were captured from the enemy forces with enormous sacrifices over the last 15 years of bloody armed struggle,' he said, raising his voice in anger.

Mr Dixit dismissed our criticisms as invalid and argued that the provincial framework was the best the Tamils could ever hope for. He said there was no need for weapons since a permanent ceasefire would come into being and an Indian peace keeping force would maintain peace. He pleaded with us to trust the Indian government and to reconsider our decision. We stuck to our position arguing that we could not trust Jayawardane and the Sinhala armed forces.

Dixit became impatient and resentful. 'Whether you accept it or not this Agreement will be signed. This is a bi-lateral Agreement between two countries. You'll face far-reaching consequences if you oppose it,' he threatened.

'Can you tell us what sort of consequences we'll have to face,' asked Yogi.

'You'll be in our custody here in India until you accept the Accord,' he said.

'Even if you keep us in custody for a long time, even for years, we'll never accept this Agreement and hand-over our weapons,' Pirapaharan replied angrily.

He stared at Pirapaharan and shouted, 'If you refuse to lay down your weapons we'll seize them by force, with the help of the Indian army. Your fighters are non-entities in front of the mighty Indian

army.' Brandishing his pipe at Pirapaharan he went on, 'In the time it takes to light this pipe and finish smoking it, the Indian army will wipe out your fighters.'

Pirapaharan smiled cynically. 'You can do whatever you like, but we'll never accept this Agreement, under any circumstances,' he said.

Dixit was enraged: his lips trembled in anger. 'Mr Pirapaharan, this is the forth time you have cheated India,' he said.

'That means I have saved my people four times,' Pirapaharan retorted.

Unable to tolerate any more, the ill-tempered diplomat got up and walked away.

Having realised that the aggressive diplomatic approach would not dislodge Pirapaharan's firm resolve, Indian officials adopted the method of friendly, cordial persuasion. MK Narayanan, the Director of India's Intelligence Bureau (IB), Shahadev, Joint Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, Nihil Seth of the Foreign Ministry, Hardeep Puri of the Indian High Commission in Colombo, visited us one by one, explaining the contents of the devolution package. When we pointed out the inadequacies and pitfalls they assured us that these issues could be discussed and improved upon later. They insisted that the LTTE's approval of the Accord was crucial before Rajiv signed the Agreement in Colombo. Despite the mounting pressure and attempts at persuasion, Pirapaharan did not yield. He maintained an iron resolve. Finally, it was decided to solicit the help MG Ramachandran, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister.

MGR arrived in Delhi on 26 July. That evening Pirapaharan, Yogi and I were taken to Tamil Nadu House in the city to meet the Chief Minister. Tamil Nadu Food Minister, Panduritti Ramachandran and Mr Dixit were present with MGR when we entered his chamber. When we were seated and the formalities dispensed with, Dixit continued his exposition of the Agreement. He tried to impress upon the Tamil Nadu leaders that Sinhala hardliners had been pressurised into accepting the merger of the Tamil regions into a Tamil linguistic state, a unified homeland. This was a remarkable achievement for which the Tamil people as a whole should be grateful to the government of India, he argued. Pointing an accusing finger at us, Mr Dixit charged, 'All the Tamil political

organisations, the TULF and the militant groups have accepted the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, except these gentlemen here. They'll never accept anything however reasonable it maybe other than a separate state of Tamil Eelam. But the Government of India will never allow the formation of an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka. They'll have to face serious consequences if they antagonise India by opposing this Agreement.'

Resting his check on the palm of his right hand, MGR listened patiently.

Yogi intervened. 'There is nothing substantial in the Provincial Council scheme. This framework fails to address the aspirations of the Tamil people. The merger of the northeast provinces is a temporary arrangement subjected to referendum. If a referendum takes place and the Sinhalese and Muslims are against merger, the Tamil homeland will be permanently bifurcated. With all these pitfalls we can't accept this Agreement,' he declared.

This intervention ignited a heated argument between Yogaratnam and Dixit.

'Mr Puri met you in Jaffna last week and explained the contents of the agreement. At that time you endorsed the Agreement. Now you're opposing it. I can't understand you,' Dixit said.

Yogaratnam denied that there was discussion on the Agreement in Jaffna.

'So, are you calling me a liar?' Dixit blurted out.

'What I am saying is that you are not telling the truth,' replied Yogaratnam.

The Chief Minister could see that the discussion between the two was becoming acrimonious and bitter. He politely requested the Indian Envoy to allow him to talk to the LTTE delegation in private. Reluctantly, Mr Dixit left the room.

MGR enquired from us as to why we were opposed to the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement. We presented an elaborate critique of the framework of the political settlement envisaged in the Agreement. We explained the defects and limitations of the Provincial scheme arguing that it falls short of Tamil aspirations. The Tamil political parties and militant organisations had capitulated to the pressure and intimidation of the Government of India. We were not prepared to betray the cause of our people under threat or intimidation, we declared. We tried to convince the chief Minister that it was unfair

and unreasonable on the part of the Indian government to demand the disarming and surrender of our freedom fighters when the Tamil nation was occupied by enemy forces and when the Tamil national question was not resolved permanently. Having patiently listened to us, MGR was able to grasp the implications of our arguments. He told us that he understood our position. Appreciating Pirapaharan's unwavering resolve, he assured the Tiger leader that he would support his decision. We were pleased and relieved when we left his chamber. As we were coming out of Tamil Nadu House, Mr Dixit met us in the corridor.

'Did the Chief Minister ask you to accept the Agreement?' he enquired. We kept a calculated silence. 'Please do what he has requested you to do,' he pleaded. We replied in the affirmative.

The Indian Prime Minister was told that the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister could not persuade Pirapaharan to accept the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement. Rajiv was disappointed and embarrassed. Nevertheless he was firmly determined to get the support of the LTTE leadership before visiting Colombo to sign the Accord. He decided to listen to our views and make a personal attempt to convince Pirapaharan.

Midnight 28 July, Pirapaharan and I were suddenly roused from our sleep by the Indian intelligence officers and told that the Prime Minister wanted to meet us urgently. We were taken to the Prime Minister's residence in a convoy of heavily armed Black Cat commandos. Rajiv Gandhi, attired in pure white national dress, received us at the entrance of his house with a charming smile. 'I have heard a lot about you. It's a pleasure to see you in person,' he said, shaking the LTTE leader's hand. He took us to his chamber. M K Narayanan, the IB chief and the Tamil Nadu Minister, Panduritti Ramachandran were waiting to meet us.

The Prime Minister initiated the dialogue, enquiring from us, very courteously, as to why we disapprove of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. Pirapaharan requested me to clarify and explain our position. I started with critique of the Sri Lanka constitution arguing that any meaningful sharing of power between the centre and the regions would not be possible under this majoritarian constitution with entrenched provisions.

The constitution entrenched a unitary authoritarian state with a powerful presidency in which power is concentrated in the centre.

Therefore, the constitution would constrain meaningful distribution of power. The major flaw in the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, I argued, was that it upheld the unitary nature of the Sri Lanka state thereby closing the space for fundamental changes in the political system.

The Indo-Lanka Accord on which the Provincial Council scheme was outlined, failed to clearly define the powers, functions and subjects of the envisaged institutional arrangement, I said. The *December 19th framework* of proposals which the Accord recommended should be the basis for further improvement, I pointed out, had already been rejected by the LTTE as limited and inadequate.

Arguing that the recognition of the Tamil homeland was an issue of paramount importance to the Tamil speaking people, I said that the merger of the northeastern provinces into a single administrative unit was a positive achievement. Yet, it was a temporary linkage and subjecting the final decision to a referendum was totally unacceptable to us, because a negative result in the referendum would permanently bifurcate the northeast and dismember the Tamil homeland, I explained.

Finally, I took up the issue of disarming of the Tamil Tiger guerrillas. I argued passionately against decommissioning the freedom fighters before a permanent settlement to the ethnic conflict, before adequate guarantees were secured for the safety of the Tamil people.

Without interruption, the Prime Minister listened patiently to our views and arguments jotting down a few points in his diary. He said that he understood our concerns. He explained that the Provincial Council scheme envisaged in the Agreement was a temporary arrangement subject to further discussions and improvements. 'We have to proceed stage by stage. It is very difficult to get everything at once. With great effort, we have secured regional autonomy for the Tamils in a united province. This represents a major advance,' Rajiv explained.

He said there were defects and flaws in the Agreement. Referring to our critique of the referendum on merger, the Prime Minister assured us that he could persuade Jayawardane not to hold a referendum. 'You must trust the Government of India. We're genuinely committed to promote the interests of your people,' Rajiv said. He further said that co-operation and support of the LTTE

leadership was crucial for the implementation of the Accord. At this stage Mr Panduritte Ramachandran intervened. He gave an exposition to Pirapaharan in Tamil of what Rajiv was saying. The Tiger leader was not impressed. 'This Agreement doesn't enhance the interests of our people. On the contrary, it seriously undermines their interests and aspirations. Therefore, we can't accept this Agreement,' Pirapaharan pointed out. Mr Ramachandran promptly translated Pirapaharan's statement. Realising that the Tiger leader could not be persuaded to accept the Agreement, Rajiv adopted a different strategy.

'We understand your position. We're not asking you to reverse your decision or change your policy. You need not accept the Agreement. What we're suggesting is that you shouldn't oppose it,' Rajiv commented.

The Tamil Nadu Minister interpreted the Prime Minister's statement more artfully. 'Is it not a wonderful turn. The Prime Minister himself accepts your position. You need not accept the Accord. But don't oppose it. At least you can do this small favour for the government of India,' Ramachandran pleaded.

Rajiv Gandhi continued, 'We are aware of the fact that your organisation as well as your people do not trust President Jayawardane. Personally I don't trust him either. Yet we have extracted major concessions from him and formulated this Accord by exerting heavy pressure. There may be defects in the Provincial Council scheme. Nevertheless we can negotiate and improve upon it enhancing the powers of regional autonomy. You should realise that it will be impossible to implement the Provincial scheme immediately. It will take a long time. During that period we can set-up an interim government in the northeast in which your organisation can play a predominate role. I am prepared to enter into a secret agreement with you regarding the formation of an interim government in the Tamil region,' he said.

Minister Ramachandran became excited and enthusiastic. He pleaded with us not to reject, in his view, this wonderful opportunity, a rare chance to set-up an LTTE administrative rule in the Tamil homeland. 'Don't worry about the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. Before that there's going to be a Rajiv-Pirapa Pact. We can formulate this pact secretly, without public proclamation,' he exclaimed.

Pirapaharan was deeply buried in thought. I felt that he did not

believe in pledges and secret pacts. But Panduritte Ramachandran was deadly serious. He was attempting to give a form and structure to the northeast interim administration conceived under 'Rajiv-Pirapa Pact'. Having agreed to give a dominant role to the LTTE in the interim administrative authority, Rajiv suggested representation from all organisations. Pirapaharan was only agreeable to limited representation to the TULF and EROS. The Prime Minister assured us that he would negotiate with the Jayawardane government on the structure, composition, powers and functions of the northeast interim government.

In view of the complaints made by Sri Lanka government, Rajiv Gandhi enquired from Pirapaharan whether he could terminate the system of taxation in Jaffna. The LTTE leader said that funds collected in the form of taxes were utilised for the administration of the organisation. If the Government of India provided funds, Pirapaharan assured Rajiv that he would stop the taxation. The Prime Minister pledged to pay five million rupees monthly, in Indian currency, to meet the LTTE's administrative expenses.

Next the critical question of disarming the Tamil fighters was taken up for discussion. The Prime Minister assured Pirapaharan that his organisation need not surrender all the weapons or disband his guerrilla army. A symbolic surrender of a few weapons would be sufficient to convince Sri Lanka and the international community that the LTTE was abiding by the obligations of the Agreement, he said. He further asserted that the Indian Peace Keeping force would enforce a ceasefire and protect the fighters and civilians. Under these conditions there would not be any necessity for weapons, he pointed out. Pirapaharan was reflecting seriously. 'What is there to think about?' Mr Ramachandran intruded. 'Hand over a few old, defective weapons you received from India,' he told Pirapaharan.

'All the weapons we received from India are old and rusty and unusable,' the Tiger leader retorted.

'Hand over those useless arms and ask for new ones from India later on,' the Minister said.

Rajiv was curious to hear the content of the conversation that was going on in Tamil. Mr Ramachandran rendered the translation of the dialogue in English. Rajiv smiled approvingly.

It was two o'clock in the morning. The Prime Minister looked

cheerful and in good spirits. He must have been pleased for having arrived at some compromise with the LTTE leader. He had to take an early morning flight to Colombo and the signing of the Accord was scheduled for the afternoon.

Gratified with his performance and delighted to have arbitrated a clandestine agreement between the two leaders, Mr Ramachandran appeared pleased with himself. Pirapaharan was reflective and sullen. There was sadness in his eyes.

As the Prime Minister had made pledges on several issues, including an LTTE controlled interim administrative authority, I asked Panduritte Ramachandran, as the meeting drew to a conclusion, whether this Rajiv-Pirapa Pact should be recorded in writing and signed by both leaders. This suggestion momentarily jolted Ramachandran. The smile vanished from his face. He pondered a while and then said, 'We've agreed on matters of extreme controversy. It involves the supply of black money and a clandestine agreement on weapons. If these matters come to light it'd create a political storm in India and Sri Lanka. Don't you trust our Prime Minister? Let us take this as a gentlemen's agreement, an agreement between two honourable men.'

'Please don't worry. I'll definitely fulfil my pledges. Let's treat this as a gentlemen's agreement, as the Minister correctly characterised,' Rajiv Gandhi said.

Pirapaharan showed no interest in a written agreement. He told me later that he did not believe the Government of India would implement the pact, written or unwritten. As we were about to leave I requested the Prime Minister to remove restrictions on us and permit the LTTE delegates to return to Jaffna, for which he agreed.

We returned to our rooms in the hotel thoroughly exhausted. Thileepan, who shared a room with me, would not let me sleep. He was asking all the details about the meeting and particularly about the secret pact and pledges. Finally he asked, 'What does Anna (Pirapaharan) think about it?' I told him that Pirapaharan was not happy and did not believe that the pledges would be fulfilled. 'Anna's prediction will definitely come true,' he said with conviction.

The Indian Prime Minister flew to Colombo as scheduled and at a grand ceremony in the afternoon Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardane signed the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement. Freed from all restrictions

we returned to Chennai. On the 2 August Pirapaharan, Yogi and Thileepan were flown to Jaffna in an Indian military aircraft.

‘We Love India’ Speech

Following the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, thousands of Indian troops with heavy weapons - tanks, artillery pieces, heavy mortars and machine guns - began to pour into Jaffna through the Palali Air Base. As the Sinhala armed forces were confined to barracks in accordance with the obligations of the Accord, Indian Peace Keeping troops, including Tamil speaking soldiers of the Madras Regiment, marched along the streets of Jaffna. The Tamil civilian population, who historically viewed India as their guardian, ally and friend, garlanded and welcomed the Indian army with joy, as if permanent peace had been established. While there was jubilation and hope amongst the Tamil people, the Sinhala south turned hostile against India, launching mass protests and demonstrations. The Marxist radicals of the Janatha Vimukthi Perumuna (JVP) spearheaded violent protest campaigns accusing the Indian government of blatant intervention in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

With this unprecedented turn of events and the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, the LTTE leadership was faced with the dilemma of explaining to the Tamil public, as well as its members, the policy decisions of the organisation. This was done on 4 August 1987 when the LTTE leader made his famous speech at Suthumalai. A crowd of over one hundred thousand people assembled in the grounds of Suthumalai Amman temple to listen to Pirapaharan spell out the future course of the Tamil freedom movement and its relations with India. The Tiger leader delivered the following historical speech in Tamil as the multitude listened in rapt attention:

‘My Beloved and Esteemed People of Tamil Eelam,

‘Today, a turning point of immense significance has taken place in the history of our struggle. This turn of events occurred so suddenly that it stunned us as if it has happened beyond our powers. We have to

wait and see whether the consequences of this turn of events will be favourable to us or not.

'You are aware that this Agreement, concluded suddenly in haste between India and Sri Lanka, without consulting us as the representatives of our people, is being implemented with expedition and urgency. I was not aware of this Agreement until I reached Delhi. Having convinced me that the Indian Prime Minister desired to meet me, I was taken to Delhi in a hurry. The Agreement was shown to us when we reached Delhi. There are a lot of flaws and defects in the Agreement. We doubt whether the Agreement will bring a permanent settlement to the problems of our people. Therefore, we explained to the Government of India, in clear terms, that we cannot accept this Agreement. But the Indian government was firmly determined to implement the Agreement whether we opposed or not.

'We are not surprised over the position of the Indian government. The Agreement is not primarily concerned about the Tamil question. It is essentially a bi-lateral Agreement concerned with Indo-Sri Lanka relations. There are obligations in the Agreement that binds Sri Lanka to India's geo-strategic sphere of influence. It prevents the penetration into Sri Lanka external subversive forces inimical to Indian interests. It is for this reason India showed extraordinary interest in the Agreement. At the same time, this Agreement contains elements that determine the political destiny of the Eelam Tamils. That is why we are strongly opposed to the Agreement since it was concluded without taking into consideration our views and the opinion of our people. But our protests are meaningless. When a mighty super-power has determined to decide the political destiny of our people it is beyond our ability to do anything.

'The Agreement directly affects the political projects of our liberation organisation; it affects the mode of our struggle; it attempts to put an end to our armed

struggle. The mode of our heroic struggle, fought for the last 15 years and built on the blood and sacrifice of our fighters, is to be dismantled in a few days time. This, we cannot digest. This Agreement suddenly disarms us, without providing adequate time, without getting the consent of our fighters, without offering guarantees for the safety and security of our people. Therefore, we refused to lay down arms.

'It was in these circumstances the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, invited me for a discussion. I spoke to him frankly about our problems. I confided to the Indian Prime Minister that I do not repose the slightest trust in the Sinhala racist state nor do I believe that the Sinhalese will implement the Agreement. I spoke to him about the issue of security of our people and the guarantees for their safety. The Indian Prime Minister has given me certain pledges. He has offered to guarantee the security of our people. I trust his sincerity. I have faith in his assurances. We trust that the Government of India will not allow the Sinhala racist state to resume genocidal violence against our people. It is because of this trust we have decided to lay down our weapons to the Indian Peace Keeping force.

'I need not elaborate here the immense sacrifices we have made for the protection of our people. Our people are fully aware of the nature and character of our deep devotion and commitment to the cause. The weapons that we took up and deployed for your safety and protection, for your liberation, for your emancipation, we now entrust to the Indian government. From the very moment we handover our weapons we hand over the responsibility of protecting our people to India. In receiving our weapons from us - the only means of protection for the Eelam Tamils - the Indian government takes over from us the tremendous responsibility of protecting our people. The handing over of arms signifies the handing over, or rather the transfer of this responsibility. Were we not to hand

over our weapons we would be placed in a perilous situation of clashing with the Indian army. We do not want that. We love India. We love the people of India. We are not prepared to deploy our arms against Indian soldiers. The soldiers of the Indian army are taking the responsibility of safeguarding and protecting us against our enemy. I wish to emphasise that by the virtue of our handing over our weapons, the Indian government should assume full responsibility for the life and security of every one of the Eelam Tamils.

‘My beloved people, we have no alternative other than to co-operate with this Indian endeavour. Let us offer them this opportunity. However, I do not think that this Agreement will bring a permanent solution to the Tamil question. The time is not far off when the monster of Sinhala racism will devour this Agreement.

‘I have an unshakable faith that only an independent state of Tamil Eelam will provide a permanent solution to the problem of the Tamil Eelam people. Let me make it absolutely clear to you that I will continue to struggle for the cause of Tamil Eelam. The forms and modes of struggle may change but the goal of our struggle will never change. If our cause is to triumph we should have the whole - hearted support of our people. Circumstances might arise for our liberation organisation to participate in the interim government, or in the election for the sake of promoting the interests of our people. But I wish to declare, firmly, that under no circumstances and at any point in time will I ever contest the elections or accept the office of Chief Minister.’

The LTTE leader’s speech, popularly labelled as the ‘We love India speech’, received wide publicity in the Sri Lankan and Indian media and gained global coverage. Some of the Indian newspapers complimented the speech as a cautiously crafted statement, a balancing act, to wriggle through the opposite tendencies of contradiction between India’s geo-political interests and Tamil aspirations for political independence. The contents of the speech betrayed the

agony of Pirapaharan, torn between love for India and its people and hatred for the Sri Lanka racist state, commented a newspaper.

As pledged by Pirapaharan at Suthamalai, the LTTE handed over a reasonable quantity of arms and ammunition to the IPKF on the following day, 5 August. The ceremony took place at Palali Air Base where over one hundred journalists and photographers, Sri Lankan, Indian and foreign, were invited to give maximum publicity to the decommissioning of the Tamil Tiger guerrillas. An Indian journalist observed that 'the LTTE handed over two van loads of mostly obsolete weapons to the IPKF', most of them received from India. General Sepala Attygalle, the Defense Secretary, represented the President of Sri Lanka at the ceremony. Senior commanders of the IPKF, General Depinder Singh and General Harkirat Singh participated on behalf of the Indian government. Several high-ranking officials of the IPKF and the Sri Lanka armed forces were present. Yogaratnam Yogi, represented the LTTE. He was supposed to hand-over a German Mauser pistol to General Attygalle as a 'symbol of surrender', during the ceremony. A proud young political leader, Yogaratnam detested the role. He reluctantly attended the function, looking stern and grim and maintained a defiant silence. As the function started, to everyone's surprise Yogaratnam suddenly got up and placed the pistol on the table, depriving the media men of the symbolic scenario of surrender. Later, Pirapaharan complimented him. Severely embarrassed, General Attygalle placed his palm on the pistol and read out his brief statement: 'Today is a historic day for the future of Sri Lanka... This act of surrendering all arms signifies an end to the bloodshed and violence that has affected the entire fabric of our democratic society.' In fact, the LTTE did not surrender all the weapons. The IPKF High Command was informed that the remaining arms would be handed over once the interim administrative authority was institutionalised under the control of the LTTE.

Why the Accord Failed

Having surrendered a portion of its weapons to the Indian Army as a symbolic gesture of co-operation, as Rajiv Gandhi suggested, the LTTE leadership awaited in anticipation that Delhi would initiate steps to set-up the interim administrative authority. There were

no initiatives from the Government of India. In the meantime, the Sri Lanka government opened up new police stations in the north-east, consolidating the state's law and order machinery in the Tamil homeland. The Sinhala colonisation schemes in Tamil areas intensified, with the backing of the government. The funds assured by the Indian Prime Minister for the administration of the LTTE's structures was discontinued after one month's instalment. The issue that deeply disturbed the LTTE leadership was the arrival in Tamil Eelam from India of a large number of armed cadres from the EPRLF, PLOTE and TELO. They were freshly trained and armed by RAW, according to confessions from some of these young fighters arrested by the LTTE. While clandestine boat landings of EPRLF and PLOTE members took place on the east coast at night, TELO cadres occupied some coastal villages in Mannar. The penetration of these armed groups hostile to the LTTE posed a serious threat to the security of the Tamil Tigers. There were attacks in which the LTTE suffered casualties. The IPKF refused to take action when the matter was brought to their attention. As time passed in a political vacuum, Pirapaharan became agitated and frustrated. Thileepan, a popular political leader in Jaffna and a person well acquainted with the pledges given by the Indian Prime Minister in the form of a gentlemen's agreement, undertook a fast-unto-death to mobilise public protest against India's failure to fulfil its assurances.

Thileepan's fast and his martyrdom is well documented and extensively treated in Adele Balasingham's work, *The Will to Freedom*. It suffices to say that Thileepan's courageous act of self-sacrifice inspired, mobilised and unified the entire Tamil nation as a collective force to protest against India's inaction. When Pirapaharan and I met Mr Dixit at the IPKF Headquarters at Palali, Thileepan was on the threshold of death. We pleaded with the Indian envoy to visit the young fighter and assure him that India would fulfil the pledges given to the LTTE and request him to break his fast. Dixit rejected our genuine plea fearing that there was a conspiracy behind our invitation. On this issue he writes:

'IPKF and our intelligence sources had informed me that the plan was to take me to Thileepan at the Nallur Kandaswamy Temple, subject me to a massive anti-Agreement and anti-Indian demonstration and

then to reject my request with a lot of publicity about the Indian High Commissioner's effort being spurned. It was clear in my mind that I would not subject the Government of India to such a humiliation.²²²

There was no plan to humiliate Mr Dixit or the Government of India. It was simply a figment of his imagination. If the Indian diplomat had visited Thileepan and assured him that Delhi would fulfil the pledges the tragedy of his death would have been avoided and Indo-LTTE relations would not have been strained.

Following Thileepan's death, Delhi exerted pressure on Dixit to persuade Jayawardane to institute an interim administrative authority with LTTE playing a predominant role.

The LTTE participated at meetings with Mr Dixit and other officials of the Indian mission at the IPFK Headquarters. I accompanied Pirapaharan during these meetings. Following extensive discussions, there was agreement on powers, functions and finally the composition of the envisaged Interim Administrative Council. Initially Jayawardane was reluctant to delegate executive powers on law and order, policing and taxation to the Council. After dilatory tactics Jayawardane agreed to devolve limited powers to maintain law and order to the administrative body. However, he demanded that, as President of the country, he should choose and appoint the Chief Administrator. He requested the LTTE leadership to recommend three names, from which he would make his choice. We realised that the old fox was playing his crafty game. The LTTE leader had already decided to appoint Mr N Pathmanathan, former Assistance Government Agent, Batticoola. Pirapaharan preferred an appointee from the eastern province to be the Chief Administrator. Since President Jayawardane was insisting on a panel of three persons to choose from, we listed Mr Pathmanathan as first in the order of preference along with two other names. Jayawardane deliberately chose the second person, Mr CVK Sivagnanam, Municipal Commissioner of Jaffna.

Pirapaharan was annoyed and requested me to convey to Mr Dixit that Mr Pathmanathan was the one and only choice of the LTTE for the post of Chief Administrator. On that day I shuttled between the IPKF Headquarters, and Pirapaharan's residence in Jaffna carrying messages. Dixit told me over the phone that

Jayawardane was adamant and unyielding. Pathmanathan, Jayawardane told the Indian High Commissioner, was more loyal to the LTTE than to the Government of Sri Lanka. He had helped the LTTE militants to escape from jail thereby violating the oath of allegiance to the government. He told Dixit, 'I am still the President. I shall not be dictated to by a separatist militant group on every detail of how I should run the administration of a part of my country'.²³ Thus the intransigence of Jayawardane and the impotence of the Government of India led to the collapse of the Interim Administrative Authority pledged to the LTTE by Rajiv Gandhi.

October 1987 unfolded as the darkest period in the history of the Tamil political struggle. On 2 October a minor incident in the sea off Point Pedro blew up into a major catastrophe precisely because of the Sri Lanka government's inflexible attitude and the incompetence of Rajiv's administration in dealing with Jayawardane. The arrests of two senior LTTE commanders, Pulendran and Kumarappa and 15 high-ranking cadres by the Sri Lankan Navy and their mass suicide in custody at the Palali Air Base was a tragedy, of immense consequences. It was the straw that broke the camels back in terms of the tense relations between India and the Liberation Tigers.

During that critical time I was given the responsibility of persuading the IPKF High Command and the Indian High Commissioner to secure their release. Mr Dixit, who was in Delhi at that time, cancelled his holidays and rushed to Colombo to plead with Jayawardane to release the LTTE cadres. Initially Dixit assured us that the problem could be resolved amicably and the LTTE leaders and cadres would soon be released. But as time went by his tone began to change and his confidence began to falter. The following morning on 4 August, Dixit revealed to me that Lalith Athulathmuthali, the Minister of National Security, was firm in his demand that all the arrested LTTE cadres should be taken to Colombo for interrogation.²⁴ I told Dixit that the President had already proclaimed a general amnesty for all the members of the LTTE following the surrender of arms and therefore their arrest and the demand for interrogation by Sri Lanka constituted a violation of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. I also warned him of the far-reaching consequences that would arise if any harm came to our fighters. Furthermore, I pointed out that the Palali Air Base had been trans-

formed into the military headquarters of the IPKF and therefore the safety and the release of the arrested LTTE cadres was the responsibility of India. Mr Dixit assured me that if Jayawardane failed to yield, he would advise the IPKF Commander, General Harkirat Singh, to secure their release.

Realising opinion in Colombo was hardening and with time running out, Dixit requested General Singh to take full control of Palali Air Base and not to allow the Sinhala soldiers to transport the LTTE cadres to Colombo. However, in my dealings with the IPKF commander I learned that his relations with the Indian High Commissioner were unfriendly and hostile. Subsequently, the General resented Dixit's request and refused to concur, arguing that there was a chain of command, the GOC Southern Command, from whom he received proper orders. Later when I met General Singh, he was furious. 'He is neither my superior nor is he a military person. If I carry out his orders there will be armed clashes between my troops and the Sri Lanka military personnel who are holding the LTTE fighters in their custody,' the General told me. He said he was deeply disturbed over the arrest and detention of the senior LTTE cadres during the ceasefire. In the IPKF commander's view it was a political issue and had to be resolved at the highest level between Colombo and Delhi.

When I visited Pulendran, Kumarappa and the others I told them Athulathmuthali was determined to have them transported to Colombo and that it was a very serious development. They knew what would happen to them if they were taken for interrogation and punishment. They immediately wrote and they all signed a letter to their leader, expressing their willingness to die rather than being subjected to torture. I delivered their letter to the Tiger leader. I watched as Pirapaharan's eyes turned red and moist while he read. They had requested him to send them cyanide capsules. He reflected for some time and then collected the deadly poisonous capsules from his commandos and bodyguards and hung them around Mathya and my necks and told us to deliver them without fail. On the eventful day, 5 October 1987, I carried out the saddest assignment I have ever undertaken for the LTTE.

In the meantime, while Dixit desperately tried to persuade Jayawardane to relent, Athulathmuthali took rapid action. Exercising his authority as Minister of National Security he

despatched a special military plane to Palali and issued orders to the Air Base Commander Brigadier Jayaratne, to shift the arrested LTTE cadres to Colombo by force. When the Sinhala soldiers were about to remove them, all the LTTE fighters swallowed cyanide. Pulendran, Kumarappa and 10 other senior cadres died immediately.

The news of the mass suicide of the LTTE leaders and cadres spread like wild fire throughout the Tamil homeland, inflaming passions of anger and revenge. The very fact that the tragedy took place at the headquarters of the IPKF turned the agonised masses hostile towards the Indian peacekeepers. Violence spread across the Tamil region. The Indian troops were jeered at and stoned and some were attacked. Tragically, reprisal killings of Sinhala civilians exploded into communal clashes in the eastern province. Jayawardane became furious and agitated; he revoked the general amnesty given to the Tamil Tigers and demanded that India take urgent action to restore order.

On 7 October the Indian Army Chief, General Krishnaswamy Sundarji and the Indian Defence Minister, KC Pant, flew to Colombo and conferred with the President. He was told of Delhi's decision to disarm the LTTE by military force. Jayawardane was delighted that his strategy of turning the Indians against the Tamil Tigers had finally succeeded. 'Operation Pawan', a major offensive to disarm LTTE fighters and take control of the Jaffna Peninsula, was to be launched on 10 October.

The IPKF commanders - the Overall Force Commander of the Indian Forces in Sri Lanka, General Depinder Singh and the Jaffna IPKF Commander, General Harkirat Singh, were opposed to military confrontation with the LTTE. Such an armed conflict, they felt, would turn into the quagmire of protracted insurgency. They disliked the very concept of transforming a peacekeeping mission into an offensive war against the people whom they were obliged to protect under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord.

On 6 October, before the outbreak of hostilities, General Sundarji visited Palali Headquarters of the IPKF to discuss the military strategy to disarm the Tigers. General Depinder Singh took the occasion to express his opposition to military action. Writing about the Indian military debacle in his book entitled '*The IPKF in Sri Lanka*', published in 1992 after the Indian military with-

drawal, Singh made the following comments on the decision to launch a war against the LTTE:

‘It was apparent that the political decision to employ force against the LTTE was already taken... My recommendation to General Sundarji was that we must not go in for the hard option because, if we did, we would be stuck in an insurgency situation for the next 20 years. I was admonished not to adopt a defeatist attitude to which my reply was that I was not being defeatist, merely realistic. The chief (General Sundarji) then flew off to Colombo. The next day IPKF HQ received direct instructions from the chief in Colombo to use force against the LTTE.’²⁵

General Depinder Singh made desperate efforts to forestall the military option. He tried to contact the Tamil Nadu chief Minister MGR. Unfortunately at that time MGR was critically ill in the United States. Instead, the General met Panduritte Ramachandran in Chennai and explained the disastrous consequences that might result if a military confrontation took place between the IPKF and the Tiger guerrillas. He pleaded with the Tamil Nadu Minister to persuade the Indian Prime Minister to reconsider the military option. It was of no avail. Having met with a negative response from Rajiv Gandhi, Minister Ramachandran informed Depinder Singh of the hardened feeling in Delhi that the LTTE ‘must be cut to size’.²⁶ Commenting on his frustrated effort, Depinder Singh says that irrespective of his advice and warnings the decision to embark on a military crackdown against the Tamil Tigers was taken at the political top level. To quote him in this context:

‘I have no reason to doubt that my reservations on adopting the hard option and the inadequacy of troops were conveyed by the Chief of Army (General Sundarji) to the Defence Minister and the Prime Minister, and if thereafter, the decision to go ahead was taken despite that advice, it was again, a political decision.’²⁷

On 9 October the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi and President Jayawardane, decided to ‘forcefully disarm the LTTE militants’ to implement the obligations of the of the Indo-Lanka Agreement. Rajiv Gandhi had already consulted his advisors, intelligence

agencies and the Chief of Indian Army with regard to the consequences of confronting the LTTE fighters. Mr Dixit refers to a confidential meeting in Delhi, where Rajiv Gandhi enquired from the Army Chief of Staff, General Sundarji, about his assessment of disarming the LTTE by force. General Sundarji asserted that 'the Indian armed forces would be able to neutralise them militarily within two weeks'.²⁸ Based on this assessment Rajiv Gandhi was not overly worried about the negative consequences.

In the early hours of 10 October 1987, the Indian troops raided the LTTE's newspaper offices, radio and television stations in the city of Jaffna. The printing press of two pro-LTTE newspapers, '*Elamurasu*' and '*Murasoli*' were blown up and the journalists arrested. The LTTE television station '*Nidarsanam*' was torched. LTTE guerrillas, using mortar fire, counter-attacked an IPKF military post at Tellipallai junction. An attempt by a convoy of Indian troops to leave the Jaffna Fort garrison was repelled by a barrage of LTTE mortar and machine-gun fire. A full-fledged Indo-LTTE war had broken out. With the outbreak of hostilities the LTTE Political Committee issued a statement lamenting:

'While the LTTE and the people of Tamil Eelam were mourning over their dead heroes, the Government of India mobilised its peace keeping forces for a bloody war against the Tamils. Neither the Tamil people nor the LTTE anticipated, even in their wildest dreams, a war with India. India was their protector, guardian and saviour and the presence of Indian troops was looked upon as an instrument of peace and love. For the LTTE, India was their promoter, a friendly power, who provided sanctuary and armed assistance, an ally who respected its role in the liberation war and recognised its political importance. Therefore the Indian decision to launch a war against the LTTE took the Tamil nation by surprise and anguish.'²⁹

The war continued for two years and seven months, the longest war that India ever faced. Indian troops suffered heavy casualties; 1500 soldiers were killed and three or four times that number wounded, most of them maimed.³⁰ As an Indian journalist commented:

‘It was a monumental blunder that kept the IPKF bogged down in a futile war for more than two years. By the time, the last of the Indian troops sailed back home in March 1990, it had turned out to be the country’s biggest diplomatic-intelligence fiasco since the 1962 war with China.’³¹

Writing on the Indian intervention, a Sri Lanka military analyst characterised the Indo-Sri Lanka war as India’s Vietnam, as a war between a mighty power against a small, weak, but ‘iron willed’, foe enjoying popular support as ‘heroes of the people’. To quote him:

‘When the history of the twentieth century is chronicled, the military historians of the future will draw a parallel between four tragic wars: the American troops in Vietnam, the Chinese troops in Cambodia, the Soviet troops in Afghanistan and the Indian troops in Sri Lanka. This will be the failure of the armies of four great powers to subdue their enemy, smaller in number, weaker in strength, poorer in training, but at the same time, iron willed, devious in strategy and ruthless to their foe...India’s ‘enemy’ was everywhere and at all times; they were heroes of the people and came from the people; they were nurtured, harboured and supported by the local people.’³²

Pirapa’s Letters to Rajiv

The Indo-LTTE war was brutal and bloody. Both the Indian army and the Tamil Tiger guerrillas suffered heavy casualties. However, those who suffered the most were the Tamil civilians. There were several incidents of horrendous massacres by Indian troops. On the first day of the invasion of Jaffna, 11 October 1987, forty people were slaughtered at Pirambadi near Jaffna University where the LTTE leader lived. This bloody carnage took place when the Indian troops made a futile commando raid on that location to assassinate Pirapaharan and other senior leaders of the organisation. The most abominable outrage occurred on 21 October 1987. Indian troops stormed the Jaffna General Hospital spraying bullets

and indiscriminately throwing hand grenades, resulting in the deaths of more than one hundred inmates, including 21 doctors and nurses. Less than a week later another terrifying bloodbath took place on 27 October in Chavakachcheri town. An Indian military helicopter launched a sudden attack, opening rocket and machine-gun fire on a crowd in the market square. Thirty civilians were killed and 75 seriously injured.

It is beyond the theme of this work to list the series of massacres committed by the Indian armed forces. It suffices to say that from well-documented cases, more than four thousand Tamil civilians lost their lives during the period of Indian military occupation. Apart from the butchery, there were hundreds of cases of rape and the plunder of property from the public. Infuriated by the atrocities of the Indian soldiers, the Tamil population supported and sustained the armed resistance campaign of the Tiger guerrillas.

When India declared war, the LTTE leadership was forced to choose between two unpleasant options. Surrendering would have meant certain death. The other option was to die fighting. Only in the second option did the Tigers have a possibility of survival, even success, if they conducted the war of resistance with courage, determination and resilience. More importantly, the second option gave them dignity: in death there was honour and heroism. For these reasons, Pirapaharan told me, he chose the second option, i.e. to fight and be prepared to die. When the LTTE leader took the high-risk option to fight the largest army in South Asia, he enjoyed wide support across the rank and file to follow his course. Though the objective conditions constrained the LTTE leadership to choose the path of strategic defence in the war with the Indian army, every effort was made to appease and reconcile with the Government of India. Within three months of the outbreak of hostilities, Pirapaharan wrote three letters to the Prime Minister of India pleading for cessation of hostilities and negotiated settlement. There was no response from Delhi.

The first letter was written on 12 October 1987, the third day after the declaration of war. The letter stated:

Honourable Prime Minister,

I wish to bring to your urgent attention of the grave and dangerous situation that has developed in

Jaffna.

The Indian Peace Keeping Forces have declared war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and commenced military offensive operations. We are compelled to fight back the Indian and Sri Lankan armed forces in self-defence, to protect and safeguard our fighters and our people from annihilation.

Our people are shocked and deeply distressed as the Government of India has declared war against our liberation organisation, which enjoys popular support. We are of the opinion that the declaration of war against the Liberation Tigers violates the very basis of the Indo-Lanka Agreement. It is the view of our people also.

A dangerous situation has arisen with the probability of heavy civilian casualties as a result of the offensive military operations undertaken jointly by the Indian forces and Sri Lankan troops. The Government of India will have to bear the full responsibility for such disastrous consequences.

I humbly appeal to you, in the name of peace and goodwill and on the basis of our good relations with the people of India, to instruct the Indian Peace Keeping Forces to cease all military offensive operations.

Velupillai Pirapaharan
Leader, LTTE

Two days later, on 14 October Pirapaharan sent a second, more detailed letter pleading with the Indian leader for peace and negotiations.

Honourable Prime Minister,

Since day by day the situation in Tamil areas is becoming critical and grave, with increasing incidents of death and destruction I am compelled to write to you again.

The crisis has deepened with massive civilian casualties in the Jaffna peninsula resulting from the military offensive operations by the Indian Peace

Keeping Force. To date, 150 civilians have been killed and about 500 injured as a consequence of blind, indiscriminate artillery shelling, mortar fire and aerial bombardment. A large number of fighters belonging to our organisation have also been killed. We have in our custody 18 Indian soldiers as prisoners of war.

As the war is intensifying thousands of Tamils have been displaced as refugees. Because of the indefinite curfew there is an acute shortage of essential food items. As a consequence our people are being subjected to enormous suffering.

It is a sad tragedy that the Indian Peace Keeping Forces, who visited our homeland to protect our people and to establish peace and normalcy, have started a full-fledged war and are committing inhuman atrocities against our people. On the morning of the 11 October, 40 civilians, including women, children and university students, were massacred by the Indian military commandos at Primabadi, near the Jaffna city. We were shocked by the assault launched by the IPKF on the public institutions serving the people. Indian soldiers, who stormed into the offices of the Tamil dailies, '*Elamurasu*' and '*Murasoli*' blew the printing machines to pieces. Jaffna General Hospital, the only medical institution for the northern province, suffered extensive damage when the Indian forces launched heavy mortar fire from the Fort garrison. Yesterday several buildings of the Jaffna University were damaged by aerial bombardment.

The Government of India is engaged in a propaganda campaign denying the use of heavy weapons and fighter planes in the war. But in reality, the Indian and Sri Lankan planes and helicopters continue to indiscriminately attack civilian targets, causing heavy casualties. Our people are deeply shocked and saddened by such actions.

In compliance with the obligations of the Indo-Lanka Accord, the IPKF should maintain peace; they

should protect the civilian public. These are their duties and mandates. Under the Accord, the IPKF does not have any legal provisions to wage war against a political organisation enjoying popular support. I appeal to you to send a fact finding mission to Jaffna comprising of international journalists, human rights representatives, Indian opposition party leaders to enquire and report to your government about the allegations of Indian military atrocities.

You are aware that both the governments of India and Sri Lanka have approached our organisation to set-up an Interim Administrative Authority in the northeastern province. This has demonstrated the fact that both governments have recognised the LTTE as the predominate political organisation in the Tamil region enjoying popular support. We have pledged to surrender the rest of the weapons once an interim administration is instituted. But it is unfortunate that the Government of India has declared a war against our organisation for the incidences of violence that erupted in the eastern province. Our organisation is not in anyway involved in the communal violence, which occurred in the east. What happened in the east was spontaneous outburst of communal violence following the tragic deaths of Pulendran and Kumarappa at the hands of Sinhala soldiers. The sorrow-stricken people of the east embittered by the sudden loss of these two senior commanders of Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts went berserk committing violence. We cautioned Mr Dixit, the Indian High Commissioner that serious consequences might arise if harm is done to the lives of our senior commanders. Mr Dixit has also warned President Jayawardane of serious consequences.

Our people are entitled to the democratic right to determine their own political destiny. It is unfair and unreasonable for a democratic country like India to impose its will and aspirations on our people at the point of a gun. Even though we have our own

reservations we pledged to co-operate with the Government of India to implement the Indo-Lanka Agreement if the interests of our people are secured. In spite of this goodwill gesture, the decision of your government to annihilate us - the authentic representatives of our people - by military means is unfair, unjust and illegal. Therefore I humbly request you to initiate a process of negotiations with our liberation organisation to effect a cessation of hostilities and to restore peace, normalcy and ethnic harmony.

Velupillai Pirapaharan
Leader, LTTE

The LTTE leader again wrote to the Indian Prime Minister on 13 January 1988. In this third and final letter he again pleaded with the Indian leader for ceasefire and negotiations. Pirapaharan also pledged to lay down all weapons when the Interim Administrative Council was formed in accordance with the secret agreement reached between Rajiv and himself. The letter states:

Honourable Prime Minister,

As our people are suffering enormously as a consequence of intensified violence and disruption of peace and normalcy in Tamil areas, I kindly plead with you once again to initiate conciliatory measures to cease armed hostilities and to restore peace and normalcy in Tamil areas.

As a goodwill measure to initiate a peace process, I kindly request you to release all our cadres and supporters in the custody of the Indian Peace Keeping Force. I also urge you to advise President Jayawardane to declare a general amnesty to our fighters.

We pledge to lay down our weapons as soon as the Interim Administrative Authority is institutionalised with a preponderate role to the LTTE as we entered into an Accord in Delhi.

We wish to reiterate that our liberation organisation will co-operate with the Government of India in the implementation of the Indo-Lanka Agreement if

the safety and security of the people are guaranteed and their interests promoted. We hold the view that the Provincial Council proposals as envisaged in the Indo-Lanka Agreement fail to fulfil the aspirations of the Tamil people. Nevertheless, we are confident that the LTTE will be allowed to play a major role in future deliberations to work out an adequate framework for a regional autonomy and self government that would satisfy the aspirations of our people.

I sincerely hope that you will give earnest and serious considerations to our views and take immediate steps to declare ceasefire and to commence negotiations with the objective of alleviating the suffering of our people and to create congenial conditions of peace and normalcy in the Tamil homeland.

Velupillai Pirapaharan
Leader, LTTE

There was no response from the Indian Prime Minister to Pirapaharan's letters. The call for the cessation of hostilities and peace negotiations were interpreted in Delhi as a desperate cry from an organisation in disintegration. Indian intelligence agencies were feeding the Prime Minister's office with misinformation, as if the collapse of the LTTE was imminent. Therefore, the more the LTTE leadership called for peace, the more military pressure it faced. Delhi had firmly decided to isolate and alienate the Tamil Tigers politically and to demobilise and destroy them militarily. In these circumstances there was no room for reviewing policy determinations. On one occasion we sent a feeler to General Depinder Singh expressing our preparedness to negotiate with the Government of India. The General conveyed the message to Delhi and to his surprise the response was negative. To quote him in this context:

'Regrettably, the view taken in Delhi was that these feelers indicated that the end was close and, therefore, the requirement was to stop talking and turn the screw some more... I remember a telegram from the High Commissioner sent from Colombo to Delhi stating inter alia that according to information

available to him, the LTTE collapse was imminent. On that I sent a message to Army Headquarters stating that... the factual position was that the LTTE were far from finished.³³

In his book analysing the role of the IPKF in Sri Lanka, General Depinder Singh laments that the army's view could not prevail in Delhi. This was because of, according to him, a lack of rapport between the Army Chief of Staff and the Prime Minister.

April 1988. Having escaped from the search and destroy operations of the IPKF, Adele and I were living underground in Bangalore. It was during that time I received an urgent message from Mr M Karunanithi, then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, to see him immediately. A secret meeting was arranged in a hotel suite in Salem, Tamil Nadu. I met him at midnight. Mr Murasoli Maran was with him. The Dravida Munnetra Kalagam (DMK) leader, Karunanithi, expressed serious concern about the military situation in Tamil Eelam particularly the danger of annihilation faced by the LTTE leadership. He enquired as to whether it would be prudent to lay down the weapons and surrender, rather than being wiped out by a formidable military power. I explained to him, to his surprise, that Pirapaharan and his fighters would be prepared to die for a noble cause rather than to surrender in humiliation and dishonour. I convinced him that the Tamil freedom fighters were brave and dauntless and had the determination and resilience for a protracted guerrilla campaign. Furthermore, I told Mr Karunanithi that the LTTE leadership was prepared to cease all armed hostilities and negotiate with the Government of India for a peaceful settlement. We were prepared to lay down our weapons and co-operate if an interim administration was instituted as pledged by the Indian Prime Minister³⁴ to the LTTE leader in Delhi.

The Tamil Nadu leaders assured us that they would convey our message to Rajiv Gandhi. Following the meeting Mr Murasoli Maran met the Indian Prime Minister and conveyed the LTTE's desire for peace and negotiated settlement. Rajiv Gandhi was not impressed. The Prime Minister insisted, Mr Maran told me later, that the LTTE should lay down their weapons and surrender or face the fury of the Indian army.

The LTTE leadership thus lost all hope of reconciliation with Delhi. While intensifying the military offensive operations, Rajiv's

administration initiated the process of alienating and marginalizing the LTTE from political affairs. This was done by promoting other Tamil militant organisations in the political arena. On the advice of the Indian intelligence agencies, Delhi decided to foster and promote the EPRLF, a Marxist organisation extremely unpopular among the people of Tamil Eelam.

Jayawardane's government colluded with Rajiv's administration in undertaking a series of measures to institute a powerless, puppet provincial administration in the northeast and to install EPRLF as the ruling party.

Two pieces of legislation, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution and the Provincial Council Bill were rushed through Parliament to provide a constitutional form to the proposals conceived in the Indo-Lanka Agreement. A Citizens Volunteer Force (CVF) was established to enable the EPRLF and other non-LTTE organisations to form themselves into a powerful military structure to police the northeast. The Indian government provided the funds for this military force, which was also known as the Tamil National army, while the IPKF undertook the responsibility of training the personnel.

The Northeastern Provincial Council elections were held in November 1988. It was a fraudulent exercise organised and supervised by the Indian Forces in which the EPRLF gained the majority of seats and Varatharaja Perumal, a central committee member, was elected as the Chief Minister.

As soon as the Tamil provincial administration was formed it ran into serious difficulties as President Jayawardane opposed the functioning of the administrative headquarters in the city of Trincomalee. The Sinhala government resented the EPRLF efforts to establish Trincomalee as the capital of the northeastern Tamil homeland. Having refused to facilitate an office to the Northeastern Provincial Council, Jayawardane adopted dilatory tactics in devolving even the limited powers to the Council. Deprived of powers, funds and office facilities, Chief Minister Perumal spent months shuttling between Trincomalee and Colombo in a futile effort to establish his administration. Neither Rajiv Gandhi nor the Indian High Commissioner or the IPKF commanders could persuade the intransigent President to devolve power to the Tamil region.

With a paralysed Provincial administration, the long and arduous mediatory effort of the Indian government reached a blind alley. The EPRLF was thrown into the political wilderness. The crafty Jayawardane had led Rajiv Gandhi astray. The Sri Lanka leader succeeded in his treacherous diplomacy of turning the India army against the Tamil freedom movement. Having outwitted the Indians and hoodwinked the Tamils, President Jayawardane retired at the end of 1988, paving the way for Ranasinghe Premadasa to assume power. The incumbent President and his administration in Colombo adopted a new policy orientation, setting the stage for radical changes in the Indo-Lanka relations. Faced with an insurrectionary situation in the South by the JVP and a protracted guerrilla war led by the LTTE, President Premadasa invited both the Sinhala and Tamil rebel movements for talks. Realising that the new President was opposed to the Indian military presence in the Tamil homeland, the LTTE leadership decided to engage in peace talks with the Sri Lanka government. Our decision to negotiate with the Premadasa regime to seek the withdrawal of the Indian military force occupying the Tamil region was a severe blow to the Indian policy of politically isolating the LTTE and militarily neutralising them. As the peace talks commenced in Colombo, the Tamil Tigers emerged from the Indian imposed isolation as a powerful national movement representing the sentiments and aspirations of the people of Tamil Eelam. Mr Dixit, in his analysis of the Indian involvement in Sri Lanka as presented in his book *'Assignment Colombo'* concedes that the Indian policy of isolating the LTTE from politics as well as from the Tamil people was a failure. Dixit says that he felt that:

'India should deal with other groups bypassing the LTTE and isolating it. My assessment at that time was if other Tamil groups join the Indian initiative, the LTTE can be successfully isolated initially which would compel it to join the peace process. I was wrong in this assessment.... Mr expectation that the LTTE could be successfully isolated from the Sri Lankan Tamils also proved to be wrong, because I did not anticipate the various undercurrents and motivations in Sri Lankan and Indian politics which would contribute to the LTTE's survival and its continuing

capacity for struggle.³⁵

The cardinal reason behind the failure of the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka, in my assessment, was the misjudgement by Rajiv Gandhi and his political advisors of the shrewd and perfidious mind-set of President Jayawardane. The Sri Lanka leader was neither sincere nor had the genuine political will to resolve the ethnic conflict in fairness to Tamil demands. Essentially a hardline Sinhala nationalist with strong majoritarian tendencies, Jayawardane, during his lengthy political history had refused to bestow justice to the Tamils. In his diplomatic dealings with Rajiv's administration, Jayawardane did not adopt an overt confrontationist course; rather, he acted treacherously to convince the Indian leaders that he was genuinely committed to resolving the Tamil issue and to implementing the Accord. It would be appropriate to say that he acted in bad faith. Mr Dixit, who interacted with the Sri Lankan President very closely in the formulation of the Accord and other critical political issues, finally laments, 'I over-estimated the sincerity and political will of Jayawardane to come to a genuine compromise with the Tamils with the help of the Government of India.'³⁶ The Indian government's over-estimation and trust placed in Jayawardane, finally led to a diplomatic debacle when the Sri Lankan leader refused to devolve powers to the Tamil province, violating the obligations of the Accord.

On the other hand, in dealing with the Tamil issue, the Government of India severely under-estimated Pirapaharan's will and determination to advance the cause of his people, even amidst seemingly insurmountable difficulties. This underestimation resulted in the Indian government subjecting the LTTE leader to various forms of pressure and persecution when he was in India and later when it unleashed a war to annihilate him and his organisation. Yet Pirapaharan survived the ordeals and continues to carry on the struggle of his people. Mr Dixit, who was severely critical of Pirapaharan during the Accord times, ultimately compliments him for his tenacity in the following terms:

'I met the leaders of practically all Tamil militant groups during my four years in Colombo. Pirapaharan naturally stands out among them. Regardless of the criticisms and prejudices that I may have about this young man, I cannot help but acknowledge his deep

idealism and his political and military skills... Events over the years have shown him as an accomplished political strategist and military tactician, qualities strengthened further by his forbearance and his capacity for survival.. His surviving the IPKF and carrying on his struggle has made him a folk hero among his people.³⁷

Dixit made the above evaluation of the Tamil Tiger leader in his penetrating study of the Indian involvement in Sri Lanka written ten years after the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord. Having confessed that he over-estimated Jayawardane, Dixit concedes that India under-estimated Pirapaharan. 'One over-arching miscalculation of India was our under-estimating Prabakaran's passionate, even obsessive commitment to the cause of Tamil Eelam ... his tactical cleverness and his resilience in adversity.'³⁸

India's mishandling of the Tamil liberation struggle to secure her geo-strategic interests was also an important factor for the failure of the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka. It is true that India had genuine geo-strategic concerns at that particular historical conjuncture. Indian intervention was motivated by apprehensions that the involvement of adverse external forces could destabilise India's security environment. To remove that threat, Delhi covertly manoeuvred the Tamil armed resistance movement, spearheaded by the LTTE, in military operations against the Sri Lankan state. In that process the Government of India succeeded in achieving her geo-strategic objective of binding Sri Lanka within her sphere of influence and removing the threat of adverse external forces. The Accord, while securing India's interests, gave primacy to the unitary structure of the Sri Lankan state by pledging to safeguard the 'unity and territorial integrity' of the island. Such an obligation in the Accord helped to reinforce the already entrenched Sri Lanka unitary constitution that closed the space for the formation of an authentic regional self-government in the Tamil homeland that would satisfy the political aspirations of the Tamil people. In other words, Indian intervention, which was primarily motivated to secure Delhi's self-interest, ignored the ethos of the Tamil national struggle; the drive, the spirit and the determination of the oppressed Tamil nation to fight for its political freedom. Thus India's intervention failed to resolve the Tamil ethnic conflict, but rather made

the issue more complex and left the Tamil freedom movement to continue to fight a lonely and bitter struggle against a callous enemy.

References and Notes

1. Gunaratna. R. 'Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies.' Colombo 1993.
2. Dixit. JN. 'Assignment Colombo.' Konark Publishers, Delhi 1998.
3. Ibid, page 327.
4. Mr G Parthasarathy told me about Mrs Gandhi's reservations concerning Jayawardane during private conversations I had with him at his residence in Delhi in the period 1984-85.
5. Mr Pirapaharan had been released on bail following a shooting incident between Uma Maheswaran and himself at Pandya Bazaar in Chennai. He was living with Pala Nedumaran at his residence in Madurai from where he left for Jaffna.
6. Mrs Gandhi took a bold step to create Bangladesh by invading East Pakistan in 1971, not purely for altruistic reasons of liberating the oppressed East Bengali nation, but for the geo-strategic objective of weakening an aggressive hostile neighbour.
7. These operations were recorded in the Diary of Combat (1975 - 1984) compiled by me as an official publication in December 1984.
8. Dixit. JN 'Assignment Colombo', page 306. Konark Publishers, Delhi, 1998.
9. Mr Saxena was appointed as the National Security Advisor to Rajiv Gandhi and later assumed the position Governor of Jammu and Kashmir.
10. Narayan Swamy. MR . 'Tigers of Lanka. From Boys to Guerrillas', page 147. 3rd Edition, Vijitha Yapa Publications. Colombo 2002
11. Joint Memorandum by the ENLF to the Authorised Representative of the Government of Indian, 18.06.1985.
12. Joint Response of the Tamil Delegation on the concluding day of phase 11 of the Thimpu talks on 17 August 1985.
13. Joint statement of the 17 August 1985 made by the Tamil delegation immediately prior to walking out of the Thimpu Talks.
14. Dixit. JN. 'Assignment Colombo'. Page 41-42. Konark Publishers, Delhi.
15. Ibid. page 43-44.

16. The details of my arrest and deportation have been extensively treated in the book 'The Will to Freedom' by Adele Balasingham.
17. Dixit. JN. 'Assignment Colombo'. Page 57.
18. Gunaratne. R 'Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka'. Page 167.
19. This information was conveyed to Mr Dixit from the Sri Lanka government sources. See page 96 in his book 'Assignment Colombo'.
20. Dixit. JN 'Assignment Colombo'. Page 118.
21. The LTTE did not have an official representative in Singapore at that time. We suspect that the anonymous person who claimed to be the representative of the LTTE and conveyed the telephone message must have been a RAW operative.
22. Dixit. JN 'Assignment Colombo'. Page 202.
23. Ibid. page 207.
24. Athulathmuthali wanted to avenge the massacres of Sinhala civilians in the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts, allegedly by Pulendran and Kumarappa, according to Dixit's accounts.
25. Singh. Lt General Depinder. 'The IPKF in Sri Lanka'. Trishul Publishers, New Delhi 1992.
26. Ibid. page 86.
27. Ibid. page 87.
28. Dixit. JN 'Assignment Colombo'. Page 156.
29. see LTTE document 'You Too India' by LTTE Political Committee, 1987.
30. Singh. D 'The IPKF in Sri Lanka'. Page 201.
31. Narayan Swamy. MR 'Tigers of Lanka. From Boys to Guerrillas'. Page 269.
32. Gunaratna. R. 'Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies.' Colombo 1993.
33. Singh. D. 'The IPKF in Sri Lanka' page 128.
34. Ibid. page 128
35. Dixit. JN. 'Assignment Colombo'. Page 344
36. Ibid. Page 344.
37. Ibid. Page 320
38. Ibid. Page 43